THEY TOOK THE VAN: TEN YEARS OF POLITICAL ABOLITIONISM, THE LIBERTY PARTY, 1839-1848

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INTRODUCTION

Fanatics! Disunionists! Fools! Such epithets were hailed at the men who from 1830 to 1860 labored for the emancipation of the American Negro. The history of the Liberty party forms a chapter in the lengthy narrative of abolitionism. Throughout the history of civilization, men have found that by banding together and promoting their particular cause in the bounds of fellowship, their chances for success are greatly enhanced. Abolitionists did not form a coherent group until December 4, 1833, when deliberations in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, culminated in the organization of the American Anti-Slavery Society. The formation of a national organization marked the beginning of a concerted effort on the part of antislavery men to present their ideas to the people of the United States.

The American Anti-Slavery Society attempted to convert the nation to abolitionism. Their methods included propagandizing through the mails by sending newspapers, tracts, and magazines throughout the country. Antislavery lectures were delivered. These methods, however, were not destined to provide their desired effects.

Mob violence often greeted abolitionist speeches and meetings, not only in the South, but also throughout

the North. The First Anniversary Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society at the Chatham Street Chapel in New York City caused a three day riot. A Society member's home was sacked, and several churches were damaged. In 1835 riots took place in Utica, New York and Boston, Massachusetts. The Boston mob of October 21 was so vehement that William Lloyd Garrison, editor of the abolitionist newspaper, The Liberator, was led to jail for his protection.[1] James Gillespie Birney, a Kentucky slaveholder turned abolitionist, was no stranger to riotous actions. In July, 1835, he faced a Danville, Kentucky mob. His antislavery newspaper, The Philanthropist, was wrecked by Cincinnati, Ohio rioters on July 30, 1836.

While meetings and lectures were being disrupted by violence in the North, the mail was being burned in the South. On July 30, 1835, a groups of citizens broke into the Charleston, South Carolina Post Office and burned stacks of abolitionist material. Protests to Postmaster General Amos Kendall resulted in the acquiescence of the federal government to Southern mail censorship. The abolitionists gained scattered support in the

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[1]Louis Filler, The Crusade Against Slavery, 1830-1860 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p. 77.

North, seemingly, because of Southern actions which were viewed as a repression of freedom of speech and press.[2]

Additional Northern support was gained by the advocates of abolitionism when the infamous gag rule was imposed in the Congress of the United States. Anti-slavery petitions were sent to Congress in an organized campaign directed by the antislavery societies for the purpose of abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia, and protesting the possible annexation of Texas. John C. Calhoun and his Southern supporters managed to have the antislavery petitions laid on the table without comment. By 1840 a procedure whereby antislavery petitions were ignored became a standing rule in the House.[3] The petition struggle brought many Northerners into sympathy with the abolitionist cause as the right of petition was considered to be a constitutional guarantee.

As arguments continued in Congress, violence continued throughout the North. In November, 1837, the abolitionist cause gained its first martyr, Elijah P. Lovejoy. Editor of an abolitionist newspaper, The Alton

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[2]W. Sherman Savage, The Controversy Over The Distribution of Abolition Literature, 1830-1860 (New York: The Association For The Study of Negro Life and History, 1938), pp. 54-55.

[3]Henry H. Simms, Emotion At High Tide: Abolition

Observer, Lovejoy was murdered while defending his press in Alton, Illinois. Thus a "physical martyr" had been added to the "civic martyrs," such as John Quincy Adams, who along with other Northern politicians had been slandered for his fight against the gag rule in Congress. Violence continued and on May 17, 1838, Pennsylvania Hall, a Philadelphia building constructed by abolitionist funds, was burned by a mob.

These events and other circumstances were to leave an indelible impression on the minds of antislavery men.[4] The mobs abolitionists faced above and below the Mason-Dixon Line, the petition struggle and resulting gag rules, the interference with the delivery of abolitionist literature through the mails, the murder of Lovejoy, and other incidents convinced many antislavery advocates of the inefficacy of the moral suasion program being attempted by the American Anti-Slavery Society. Their ensuing actions cover the period from 1839 to 1848; their policies came to be termed political abolitionism; and their political organization was known as the Liberty party.

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as a Controversial Factor, 1830-1845 (Richmond, Virginia: William Byrd Press, 1960), p. 119.

[4]Clement Eaton, "Mob Violence In The Old South," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXIX (December, 1942), p. 351.

CHAPTER I

PETITIONING AND QUESTIONING FAIL

In 1838 abolitionists faced an ever increasing problem: what means should they use to accomplish their goals? Their meetings and lectures were disrupted. Their literature burned. A member of the flock had been murdered. The petition struggle was gaining some Northern adherents to their side albeit the ultimate goals of anti-slavery men seemed as far away as before. The need for a mode of action to accomplish abolitionist desires was evident. Diversity within the antislavery ranks, however, did not tend to ameliorate their disputes over methodology and final purpose.

Within the American Anti-Slavery Society the vestiges of that diversity were being manifested in disagreements concerning the actual purposes of the organization. In 1838, Alvan Stewart, a resident of Utica, New York, and member of the American Society, proposed that the 1833 Constitution of the group be altered. Stewart wished to delete the clause in the governing document which affirmed the rights of the Southern states under the Constitution of the United States.[1] Stewart, speaking at the Fifth Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery

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[1]Bayard Tuckerman, William Jay And The Constitutional Movement For The Abolition of Slavery (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1893), p. 52.

Society, held in New York City, in May, 1838, proposed a resolution which would have recognized the power of the federal government over slavery wherever the peculiar institution existed. The Society's Constitution declared that Congress had the power to abolish slavery in the territories and the District of Columbia, and that the interstate slave trade was within its legislative authority. Yet, the states were free to legislate within their borders on the question of slavery.[2]

Although Stewart's opinions were shared by others in the Society, the necessary two-thirds majority was not willing to back his suggestion. This question of constitutional power over slavery was a common problem in the years prior to the Civil War. In fact, it would cause serious splits in the abolitionist ranks.

The formation of a separate political party composed of abolitionists was deprecated by the American Anti-Slavery Society, but other means of political action were advised. At the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Society the following resolution was adopted:

> ...We recommend to abolitionists throughout the country to interrogate candidates for office with

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[2]Ibid., pp. 92-93.

> reference to their opinions on subjects connected with the abolition of slavery, and to vote irrespective of party for those only who will advocate the principles of universal liberty.[3]

Also, the Executive Committee of the Society was instructed to question the presidential and vice-presidential candidates on these issues: the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, the interstate slave trade, the annexation of Texas as a slave state, and the recognition of Haitian independence.[4]

The practice of questioning candidates for public office concerning their attitudes toward slavery and abolition was viewed by many antislavery men as the most efficient means of thwarting the proslavery forces. Men who advocated the "test question" as a reliable procedure and considered questioning the strongest political weapon of abolitionism used as their motto, "Vote for no man who votes against freedom."[5]

Throughout the North, state antislavery societies announced that their members did not intend to vote for Northern political candidates who refused to avow beliefs in the right of petition and congressional power over

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[3] *Emancipator* [New York City], May 10, 1838.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] William Birney, *James G. Birney And His Times,*

slavery in the District of Columbia and territories. A Rochester, New York, antislavery meeting passed such a resolution in January, 1838.

> ...While we as abolitionists refrain from political organization, yet, we will bestow our suffrages only upon those candidates for Congress, and the state Legislature, who will maintain inviolate the right of petition, and the duty of Congress to abolish the slave trade between the states, and slavery in the District of Columbia and the territories.[6]

The Maine State Anti-Slavery Society, meeting at Augusta, in March, 1838, stated that those politicians who would not favor emancipation in the nation's capital and termination of the slave trade were unworthy of its support.[7] A circular prepared by the American Anti-Slavery Society, January 5, 1838, and addressed to the "Friends of Emancipation," asserted that failure of the petition drive because of the gag rules had placed the "freeman of the North...on a level with the slave."[8]

Abolitionists were prepared to use their political

The, Genesis of the Republican Party With Some Account Of Abolition Movements In The South Before 1828 (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1890), p. 201.

[6] Emancipator, January 25, 1838.

[7] Ibid., March 15, 1838.

[8] Ibid., January 11, 1838.

power. However, the American Society, at its Fifth Annual Meeting, decided against the formation of an independent antislavery political party.[9] Their cause could best be served, thought the abolitionists, by preparing test questions for politicians, "scattering" their votes among candidates who answered the questions in an acceptable manner, and delegating to antislavery voters a balance of power position in political affairs.

At a convention of New England abolitionists, held May 30 to June 1, 1838, in Boston, Alvan Stewart offered a resolution which was adopted by the assemblage. The convention resolved that although "the formation of any distinct anti-slavery organization" was deplored by them and thought to be "most fatal to the success of the anti-slavery enterprise," the duty to vote, irrespective of party, for those, and those only, who would "promote the great cause of emancipation and human liberty" was an important responsibility of abolitionists.[10]

Yet, pressure or balance of power politics proved to be a failure. The questioning system was unsuccessful for a variety of reasons. Most antislavery men were Whigs.

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[9] Ibid., May 10, 1838.

[10] Ibid., June 14, 1838, citing the Pennsylvania Freeman.

The Whig party of the 1830's was primarily an anti-Jackson party. No amount of provocation could induce a Whig to vote for a Democrat during the Jacksonian Era.[11]

In the 1838 New York gubernatorial election, questions concerning civil rights in New York were submitted to the candidates by a committee of the American Society. William H. Seward won the Governor's race that year. His answer to the abolitionist's queries was:

> Persons selected as the representatives of political principles, can have no right to compromise their constituents by the expressions of opinions on other subjects than those in reference to which the selections were made.[12]

Thus Seward and many other political aspirants sidestepped the abolitionist's questions by refusing to commit themselves. Even if office seekers answered the inquiries to the abolitionist's satisfaction, gained their support and subsequently were elected, there was no assurance that they would stand by their professed beliefs once in office.

If petitioning and questioning were impotent

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[11]Dwight L Dumond, Antislavery: The Crusade For Freedom in America (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1961), p. 291.

[12]Ibid., p. 292.

methods of political action, why were the abolitionists so hesitant about forming a distinct antislavery party? The Board of Managers of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society prepared "An Address to the Abolitionists of Massachusetts, on the Subject of Political Action" in 1838. While admitting that the slavery question could not and ought not be "disjoined from politics," the Board cautioned that the slavery issue should not be considered a "mere political question," but religious and moral considerations should spark the people's desire to speak out on the subject, precisely and authoritatively, to their political representatives.[13]

The Board spoke out sharply against the idea of a separate abolitionist party. They spoke of such a policy as being "dangerous, if not fatal to the efficiency" of their organization. Reasons for their distaste for political organization were given: power struggles within the antislavery ranks would result and tarnish the movement's image; a political cause would lose the support of ministers of the gospel; diverse elements within the movement would split over public policy, (Democrats and Whigs would not agree on candidates or platforms); experience showed the two-party system to be the only political system workable

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[13]Emancipator, August 23, 1838.

under a free government; drop-outs from the other parties would infiltrate a third party and lower its standards of principle; political power would be lost because a minority party working outside the framework of the two stronger parties would no longer exert influence on the policies of those parties; and the party would be considered only interested in abolition, and abolitionist's interests in other public concerns would not be recognized by the public. The Board cautioned the antislavery men not to "turn party politicians," but rather "in politics as elsewhere to stand firm by our principles, and let the politicians come to us." [14] The politicians, however, did not come forward to aid the antislavery movement; some became more adamant in their opposition.

Henry Clay, senator from Kentucky, delivered a speech, February 7, 1839, which influenced abolitionist actions possibly as much as the Northern riots and Southern mobs had. Clay's oration was prompted by a petition presented to the Congress by a group of capital citizens, asking that the Congress not interfere with their "domestic relations." [15]

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., February 14, 1839.

In his speech, Clay divided the abolitionists into three groups: the humanitarians, the apparent abolitionists, and the ultra abolitionists. The first class of abolitionists were considered by Clay to be honest philanthropists. The second division, motivated by "sinister purposes," sought to convince the first group that a proslavery South was intently conducting a campaign to abridge the civil and constitutional rights of the nation. A third class, ultra abolitionists, were determined to overthrow slavery by any means, regardless of consequences, and were motivated by feelings devoid of honor, patriotism, or respect for the rights of property.[16]

> It is because these ultra-abolitionists have ceased to employ the instruments of reason and persuasion, have made their cause political, and have appealed to the ballot-box, that I am induced upon this occasion to address you....[17]

If the political activities of the abolitionists influenced Clay's speech, his February oration affected those activities even more. The biographer of Myron Holley,

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Appendix of the Congressional Globe of the 25th Congress (Washington, D.C.: Blair and Rives, 1839) Vol. 7, p. 355.

writes that Clay's speech "excited a profound emotion in the breast" of Holley.[18] William Birney, son of James G. Birney, stated that his father's idea of independent nominations received a "strong impulse" from Clay's speech.[19] Joshua Leavitt, editor of the Emancipator, an organ of the American Anti-Slavery Society, considered Clay's speech uneloquent and unworthy of "The Great Compromiser." Leavitt believed Clay "KNEW HE WAS WRONG" in his assertions and added that he did not allude to the "GREAT MORAL QUESTION OF RIGHT" which was the foundation of the abolitionist's philosophy.[20]

Leavitt published the comments of an unidentified Whig friend who was surprised at Clay's "ignorance of the principles of the abolitionists, and of the character of the people of the free states." An anonymous member of Clay's own party, after commenting that the speech showed Clay's intention to be nominated for the presidency, predicted that Clay would not receive the Whig nomination. "If the whigs of the free states are fully and fairly represented in the national convention, that speech will

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[18]Elizur Wright, Myron Holley, and What He Did For Liberty And True Religion (Printed for the author, 1882), p. 243.

[19]Birney, op. cit., p. 344.

[20]Emancipator, February 21, 1839.

prevent his nomination - if they stop a moment to count the cost." [21] The prophecy was fulfilled. At the December, 1839, Whig Convention at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, William Henry Harrison became the 1840 Whig standard-bearer.

The petition struggle saw several Whig politicians presenting antislavery remonstrances; these men were considered by the abolitionists to be friends of the antislavery movement, if not out-and-out abolitionists. Joshua Giddings of Ohio, William Slade of Vermont, John Q. Adams of Massachusetts, and Seth M. Gates of New York were within the ranks of the Whig congressmen sympathetic to the antislavery cause. During the 1830's the only Democratic congressman considered a friend of abolitionism was Senator Thomas Morris of Ohio. After Henry Clay's February anti-abolitionist speech, Morris answered with an antislavery oration. At the end of Morris's 1832-1838 term he was not nominated to run again for his senatorial office. The Democratic party of Ohio purged Morris from their group because of his pro-abolition stand. The abolitionists could not expect a party which would remove a public servant such as Morris to embody antislavery

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[21] Ibid., February 14, 1839.

principles in its programs.[22]

Difficulties with the two reigning political parties, the Congress, and the public were not the only problems facing the abolitionists. Dissension within their own societies was becoming more and more apparent.

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[22]Dumond, op. cit., p. 292.

CHAPTER II

UNITY FROM DIVISION

Members of the American Anti-Slavery Society gradually split into factions; ultimately some of its members seceded from the organization. The Society schism, prompted by a variety of disagreements, coincided with a movement which urged abolitionists to command a leading role in the political affairs of the country. The political activists nominated a presidential candidate in 1840, and formed an organization which they christened the Liberty party. The division of the American Society is pertinent to the establishment of the Liberty party for opposition to voting, politics, and civil government in general, on the part of some Society members, convinced others that they had to disassociate themselves from professed anarchists.

As early as 1838, Dr. Francis Julius LeMoyne, a Pennsylvania physician and devout antislavery disciple, warned that a breach in the abolitionist ranks would occur. LeMoyne thought political abolitionism would split the antislavery group. Elizur Wright, one of the American Society's officers, reassured LeMoyne, "'a chip or two may be struck off and we shall be all the sounder and trimmer for that.'" [1]

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[1]Margaret C. McCulloch, Fearless Advocate Of The

The "chip or two" Wright referred to were those abolitionists who were avowing and promoting the philosophies of non-resistance, women's rights, anti-clericalism, no voting, and ultimately, no-government (a brand of religious anarchism). Massachusetts was their center; William Lloyd Garrison was their leader. The "woman question" plagued the societies for several years. Garrison and his followers argued that women should be allowed membership and full privileges in antislavery societies, including the right to hold offices and serve on committees. In 1838, the New England Anti-Slavery Society, Garrison's stronghold, voted to permit all persons, regardless of sex, to participate as full members. This resolution was protested by a group of society members led by Amos A. Phelps and Charles T. Torrey.[2]

In early 1839 an open breach was coming to the surface in the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. Henry B. Stanton, a secretary of the American Society, wrote to Elizur Wright in January, 1839, declaring that "A bold effort was made at the annual meeting to make the Mass. A.S. Society subservient to the non-resistance society,

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Right; The Life of Francis Julius LeMoyne, M.D., 1798-1879 (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1941), p. 136.

[2]Bayard Tuckerman, William Jay and the Constitutional Movement For The Abolition of Slavery (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1893), p. 101.

& it succeeded." Refusing to declare voting abolitionists duty bound to "vote for the slave" when at the polls, the Garrisonians drowned out protests of members who did not approve of the Society's course. Stanton predicted the formal separation of "all the Methodists, Baptists, Orthodox, & liberals" from the Massachusetts Society if the parent American Society did not squelch the Garrisonian movements at their outset.[3]

Stanton wrote of the split in more pessimistic terms when he communicated with James G. Birney, another American Society secretary. The Massachusetts Society had run up "the crazy banner of the non-government heresy" said Stanton, and consequently, "The split is wide, and can never be closed up."[4]

At the January meeting in Massachusetts, Stanton presented a resolution proposing the establishment of a new antislavery newspaper in Massachusetts. Prior to the annual meeting an article in Garrison's Liberator foretold the proposal and warned that the purpose of the establishment

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[3]H.B. Stanton to Elizur Wright, January 20, 1839, Elizur Wright Papers, 1839-1841 (Manuscript: Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.).

[4]H.B. Stanton to J.G. Birney, January 26, 1839, in Dwight L. Dumond (ed.), Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857 (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1966), I, p. 481. Hereafter referred to as Birney Letters.

of a competitor to his Boston-based weekly was to change the men entrusted with the management of the antislavery cause. Garrison was sure he knew who backed the new paper project. "The clergy and their special friends," stated the Liberator, "must have the control of it [the antislavery cause]; and it must be carried on in a more judicious and a less ultra manner!"[5]

Garrison was correct in his belief that certain people in the Massachusetts Society, including some clerical members, wished to supplant his ideas with their own. Also, their plans would have reduced Garrison's leading role in the movement. The chief proponent of the new paper plan was the man who introduced the idea at the January, Boston meeting, Henry B. Stanton. By late January Stanton had succeeded in secretly hiring Elizur Wright to edit the new abolitionist publication.[6] Evidently the news of Wright's approaching Boston arrival leaded out, for Maria W. Chapman, a backer of Garrison, warned Wright that his acceptance of the editorship of "Torrey's paper" would be an offer of his assistance in "a scheme which has nothing to recommend it & everything

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[5]The Liberator, [Boston], January 18, 1839.

[6]H.B. Stanton to Amos Phelps, January 29, 1839, Wright MSS.

to condemn it." The purposes of the backers of the new paper, wrote Mrs. Chapman, were to destroy the Liberator, rebuke the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, help the Church to stand aloof from the abolitionist struggle, and to base the whole antislavery organization on political action. She also charged that the words of these men, (C.T. Torrey, A.A. Phelps, H.B. Stanton, Alanson St. Clair,) at the Massachusetts meeting, showed them to be "more opposed to Garrison than to slavery."[7]

Wright answered Mrs. Chapman by stating that Garrison's adoption of radical religious views had incapcitated his "powerful pen" at a time when special fervor was needed in "attacking slavery through the ballot box." Although he did not question Garrison's right to use the Liberator as a channel for his peculiar religious and political views, Wright claimed that this had in effect shut Garrison's paper "out from a large portion of the public it might have had."[8] However, Stanton, not Wright, was the manipulator of the new Massachusetts paper. In March, Stanton wrote Wright advising him to prepare an

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[7]M.W. Chapman to Elizur Wright, February 3, 1839, Wright MSS.

[8]Elizur Wright to M.W. Chapman, February 5, 1839, Wright MSS.

article which would show the abolitionists they had nothing to gain and everything to lose by "sticking" to their parties.[9] Stanton believed a new antislavery paper was needed to thwart Garrison; the Liberator's editor would "destroy the A.S. Society rather than fail in making it subservient to his ends."[10]

Amos A. Phelps, recording secretary and member of the Board of Managers of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, resigned his offices in April, 1839, claiming the Society was "no longer an Anti Slavery society simply, but has become, in its principles and modes of action, a woman's rights - non-government - anti slavery society."[11] While the split in the Massachusetts Society was rapidly becoming inevitable, the relationship between the Garrisonians and the officers of the American Anti-Slavery Society was fast approaching open hostility.

Added to philosophical disagreements among the abolitionists were problems concerning financial arrangements. The parent society, located in New York City, had been promised donations from the local societies. The Massachusetts

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[9]H.B. Stanton to Elizur Wright, March 12, 1839, Wright MSS.

[10]H.B. Stanton to Elizur Wright, April 12, 1839, Wright MSS.

[11]Amos Phelps to [James C. ?] Jackson, April 30,

Society reneged on its pledge and the national organization demanded its promised funds. A squabble ensued which threatened a schism. When the New Yorkers proposed sending their own agents into Massachusetts to collect funds and thus by-pass the Massachusetts Society, a prominent Bostonian threatened that such harsh steps would lead to a bitter quarrel, "not confined" to Massachusetts.[12]

While the arguments in Massachusetts were over the many philosophies of Garrisonism, the main differences between Garrison and leaders of the parent society were engendered by Garrison's advocacy of non-resistance and no-government theories. These differences spurred on cries for an abolitionist political party. The Business Committee of the national organization was in attendance at the April, 1839, quarterly meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. Lewis Tappan and James Birney journeyed to Boston's Marlboro Chapel to discuss pecuniary difficulties. However, while there, Birney alluded to political action and presented his view of the American Society's Constitution. He stated that he thought it

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1839, Wright MSS.

[12]Ellis Gray Loring to J.G. Birney, February 16, 1839, Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., I, p. 484.

"ungenerous in men belonging to the Society to use the power they possessed to change the character of the Society without previously having the constitution altered to suit their views."[13] This was an obvious allusion to Garrison and his non-resistance doctrines.

Garrison retorted by claiming only those who believed in political action should go to the polls, and in an article in his Liberator, he accused Birney, Stanton, and Lewis Tappan of insisting that a member of the Society had to vote by reason of duty.[14] In the Emancipator's columns, Joshua Leavitt replied to Garrison with a countercharge and a warning, predicting that "...any appearance of a desire for domination, an intolerant spirit, or a design to thrust in other subjects, and make them ride on the anti-slavery car" would "infallibly create resistance, jealousy, and discord."[15]

A moot point among abolitionists was their diverging interpretation of the United States Constitution. Antislavery views concerning that historical document stretched from Alvan Stewart's belief that Congress could constitutionally regulate or abolish slavery, even in the slave states, to

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[13] Emancipator, April 14, 1839.

[14] Ibid., citing The Liberator.

[15] Emancipator, April 11, 1839.

Garrison's proclamation that the Constitution was "'a convenant with death and an agreement with hell.'"[16] At this time, it seemed a majority of the members of the American Anti-Slavery Society took a middle position between these two extremes.

At Penn Yan, New York, February, 1839, conventioneers heard Myron Holley, editor of the Rochester Freeman, deliver a speech in which he proclaimed the "great design of the Constitution" was to "set up and support the principles of freedom, or the rights of man." He denied the assertion, made by Henry Clay in his February speech, that slaves were property by virtue of the Constitution, arguing that the Constitution had always considered slaves as persons. Holley also claimed that owing to certain constitutional provisions, Congress had power over slavery in the territories, the District of Columbia, and the interstate slave trade.[17] Local antislavery conventions throughout New York State soon adopted resolutions in accordance with Holley's viewpoint.[18]

No-government theories could not be reconciled with the active role of government idea postulated by

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[16]Louis Filler, The Crusade Against Slavery, 1830-1860 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p. 216.

[17]The Friend of Man, [Utica, New York], April 3, 1839.

[18]Ibid., July 3, 1839.

Holley and others. If Garrison's views were accepted by a majority of the antislavery society's members, even the recent but meager advances of the cause (reaction to the petition struggle, election of antislavery Whigs, balance of power position,) would be lost.

As the differing views were openly avowed a breach in the national society seemed evident. In May, 1839, the Emancipator published an article by James Birney entitled, "View of the Constitution of the American Anti-Slavery Society As Connected With the No-Government Question." An article in the 1833 Constitution of the American Society had stated that the Society would use "moral and political" power to abolish slavery and by 1839, this clause was interpreted by some abolitionists to mean that an abolitionist political party was an acceptable vehicle for antislavery agitation.

In his article, prepared in April under the title, "A Letter On the Political Obligations of Abolitionists," Birney stated:

> For my part I can see no good reason why the No-Government party should wish to remain in the Anti-Slavery Association, seeing it must be productive of endless dissentions; - especially, when, by withdrawing and forming on a platform of their own, they could conduct their enterprise vigorously

> and harmoniously, and permit the abolitionists, who are the advocates of the elective franchise, to do the same with theirs.[19]

Garrison wrote to his wife from Providence, Rhode Island, apprising her of Birney's article, and labeling the item "'unfair, unmanly, and proscriptive....'" The Bostonian viewed the Emancipator article as a positive sign that a "'desperate struggle,'" resulting in a division in the American Society, would take place at New York. Garrison's mind was not troubled, however, since he was convinced of his own righteousness. "'The Lord of hosts is my rock and refuge.'"[20] He knew God was on his side.

Disruption within the national society seemed a certainty as the members prepared to meet in New York City for their Sixth Annual Meeting. Samuel May of Massachusetts wrote to Garrison explaining why he would not be in attendance.

> ...I cannot afford the expense.... But I confess, I do not lament my inability to go so much as I should do if the prospect of an agreeable meeting was fairer. I am apprenhensive that it will be not so much an anti-slavery as an anti-Garrison and anti-Phelps meeting, or an anti-Board-of-Managers and anti-Executive-Committee meeting.[21]

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[19] Emancipator, May 2, 1839.

[20] Wendell P. Garrison and F.J. Garrison, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879; the story of his life told by his children. (New York: The Century Company, 1885), II, p. 293.

[21] Ibid., pp. 294-295.

The Sixth Anniversary Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society took place at the Broadway Tabernacle, May 7 to 10, 1839. A reporter for the Christian Mirror wrote that many abolitionists thought the one question the convention meant to settle was whether or not the Society "'would have anything to do with Garrison."[22]

Gerrit Smith, a wealthy philanthropist from Western New York State, was elected to chair the convention of 435 members representing 13 states. The seating of delegates and their voting rights was the major question on opening day when Nathaniel Colver of Washington County, New York, moved that duly appointed men only should constitute the roll.[23] Ellis Gray Loring of Massachusetts, representing Garrisonian forces, offered a resolution requesting that the roll of the meeting be made by "placing thereon the names of all persons, male and female, who are delegates from any auxiliary society, or members of this society." Loring's resolve carried by a vote of 180 to 140. Immediately, Lewis Tappan and C.T. Torrey gave notice they would protest the tolerance of women voting in the meeting. Two anti-Garrison ministers, Amos A. Phelps and La Roy Sutherland,

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[22]Ibid., p. 297.

[23]Emancipator, May 23, 1839.

ffered a resolution claiming that women could not speak r serve on committees. However, this resolve was voted lown, May 8, and Chairman Smith, who had voted for the right of women to be enrolled in the meeting, appointed bby Kelley to a seat on a committee.[24]

On May 9 a resolution presented by Gerrit Smith as adopted. Smith's motion stated that for the sake of harmony, the Executive Committee was invited to refrain from sending any agents to a state without the assent of that state's local society, should such an organization exist.[25]

The anti-Garrisons were rapidly losing ground. This resolution affirmed Garrison's control over the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society and the funds that organization collected in the state of Massachusetts. Lewis Tappan, Birney, and Stanton had been defeated on the woman question, and now the fund raising issue was decided in Garrison's favor. The final matter to be considered by the assembly was the question of political action.

An Abstract of the Sixth Annual Report of the Business Committee of the national society was presented to the convention. Stanton had made a speech at the

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

business meeting which was published in the report, and in it he had outlined the means by which the free states might abolish slavery in the nation. Stanton based his notions on the assumption that political action exerted on Congress by the free states would mean the death knell to the dreaded institution. First, said Stanton, slavery must be abolished in the District of Columbia, but this would be accomplished only if a full discussion of the subject took place in both Houses of Congress. For if emancipation could be achieved in the District, the abolitionist cause would be the "solemn verdict" of the nation, the whole chattel system would be "outlawed, branded with ignominy, consigned to execration and ultimate destruction."[26] A second power to be "wielded by the North" against slavery was congressional prohibition of the internal slave trade. Stanton claimed that owing to the powers of regulating interstate commerce, possessed by Congress, the slave trade between the states could be ended by congressional legislation. Stanton also believed the free states, acting through Congress, could use their power to prevent admittance to the Union of would-be states whose constitutions allowed slavery.

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[26] Emancipator, May 16, 1839.

Stanton asserted that the South, acting as one man, controlled the nation, and that division in the North permitted the slave states to sell the political influence for an "enormous price." But a change was now in the offing for the free states outnumbered the slave states seven to six, and Stanton believed the North could checkmate the South by independent state action. An individual state action program, presented by Stanton, consisted of state constitutional reform, demand for a jury trial for fugitive slave, protestation of laws which imprisoned colored visitors to the South, and legislative remonstrances. If all this fails, said Stanton, the North has a denier resort: it could alter the federal Constitution and bring slavery within the control of federal legislators. If such action resulted in the dissolution of the Union, Stanton believed the slaves would either rebel or flee, and that other countries would not come to the aid of the South owing to the stigma of legalized slavery.[27]

On a motion presented by Garrison, the Society resolved that the portion of the report which dealt with political action be referred to a committee consisting of one member from each state delegation. Garrison was

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[27] Ibid.

elected chairman of the committee and he drafted three resolutions which were accepted by the convention. While the Executive Committee, including Stanton, presented views apart from those of the Society, Garrison's resolutions were presented to the public as the official conviction of the American Anti-Slavery Society. The three resolves stated that (1) it was the duty of the American people, especially abolitionists, to endeavor to elect to official stations only those men who would work toward the "repeal of every legal enactment by which the aid of the public authority is lent to the support of slavery"; (2) abolitionists should not be discouraged because of the temporary failure to attain their objects by use of petitions and voting, but should steadily persevere in their methods until ultimate triumph was secured; and (3) at the inception of the national society, the founding members neither contemplated nor desired to exclude from its membership any person whose conscientious scruples prevented him from participating in "all the measures which the mass of the Society, either originally or subsequently," deemed proper for advancing the antislavery cause.[28]

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[28] Ibid., May 23, 1839.

The final resolution was, in essence, a defeat for the political activists. Birney had presented a resolution to the committee which stated that "to maintain that the elective franchise ought not to be used by abolitionists to advance the cause of emancipation" was "inconsistent with the duty of abolitionists under the constitution." Refusing to accept the Birney resolve, the Business Committee presented a resolution of their own stating that:

> this society still holds, as it has from the beginning, that the employment of the political franchise, as established by the constitution and laws of the country, so as to promote the abolition of slavery, is of high obligation - a duty, which, as abolitionists, we owe to our enslaved fellow countrymen groaning under legal oppression.[29]

A slender majority of seven adopted the motion of the business committee.

As a last resort Birney presented a protest against the participation of women in the national society. Reasons were given for the signers' opposition to the principle that "women have the right of originating, debating, and voting on questions" before the Society, and that women were eligible to hold various offices in the organization.

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[29] Ibid.

The protestors, who wished to record their opposition to the addition of subjects other than abolition in the Society's program, based their actions on the Constitution of the American Society, claiming that the integration of women in the Society was "contrary to the expectation, design, and spirit of the Constitution," and "at variance with the construction of said instrument...." Moreover, the signers proclaimed the acceptance of women on an equal basis with male members of the Society was "repugnant to the wishes" of many early and present members, and not in accordance with the beliefs of most abolitionists, men and women, throughout the country.

> Because it is rather the expression of local and sectarian feelings, of recent origin, than of those broad sentiments which existed among the friends of our great enterprise at its beginning and which led to the framing of the Society on a foundation where all sects might stand and wield the potent weapon of our warfare against the oppression of our brethren.[30]

In their closing argument, the signers claimed that they were not commenting on the "abstract question of the rights of women," but on the efficacy and desirability of attaching the issue to that of slavery, asserting

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[30]The Liberator, May 31, 1839.

that the principle accepted by the Society would:

> ...bring unnecessary reproach and embarrassment to the cause of the enslaved, inasmuch as that principle is at variance with the general usage and sentiment of this and other nations, under whatever form of government, and of every age....[31]

If the cause of the slave and that of women were one and the same, the protesters claimed they would assume both in defiance of "universal custom and sentiment," and would show their views "openly and manfully" by either changing the "constitution of our Society, or our organization itself."[32] Signatures affixed to the protest included those of Lewis Tappan, James G. Birney, A.A. Phelps, Alanson St. Clair, C.T. Torrey, and 118 others. Seemingly not an argument against women's rights, the protest is indicative of the opinion held by many members of the Society that Garrison intended to foist his many beliefs upon the Society, and in the process, alienate public opinion, retard the movement, and embarrass the abolitionists in the Society who viewed that body as strictly an antislavery organization.

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

The meeting ended with a call for a convention to be held at Albany, July 31, 1839, to discuss the principles relative to the "proper exercise" of the franchise by free state residents.[33] Although the national society was left intact, precariously, following the May meeting, signs of disruption were apparent in Massachusetts.

At the New England Convention, held May 28 to 30, in Boston, a formal secession took place which culminated in the formation of the Massachusetts Abolition Society on May 29, 1839.[34] Elizur Wright and Amos Phelps were elected to serve as the secretaries of the new society. Five days pervious to the New England Convention, Wright, editor of the Massachusetts Abolitionist, the organ of the new society, had published an article in his paper concerning Garrison's views on religion and government. Wright claimed that Garrison's views were matters of concern to him only "because they seem to take out of Mr. Garrison's hands, and out of the hands of the society which has virtually given them its sanction, the staff of accomplishment.[35] Garrison's non-voting, non-resistance

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[33] Emancipator, May 23, 1839.

[34] Liberator, June 14, 1839.

[35] Emancipator, May 30, 1839, citing Massachusetts Abolitionist.

ideas came under the attack of Wright's pen.

> As to the practical and vital matter of applying anti-slavery moral power to the thing to be done, Mr. Garrison is not where he was, therefore we are where we are. Mr. Garrison could once vote himself and urge other people to vote, without stint or reservation - in behalf of the law-chained millions. Now he tells us his conscience forbids him to vote,....[36]

After the Massachusetts Abolitionist Society was made an auxiliary of the national organization, the political activists were not alone in their assumption that an open breach in the national society was imminent for the Garrisonians claimed that the new partnership was "'in the vain hope that the American Society will retrace its steps at the next annual meeting.'" Backers of the old Massachusetts Society predicted that should the American Society "'adhere to its recent decision, then an attempt will doubtless be made to organize a rival national society, to be managed by a small conservative body, after the pattern'" of the new Massachusetts Society.[37]

Garrison was convinced that those opposing the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, and the Liberator were motivated by a desire to oust him from the movement.

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Garrison, op. cit., II, p. 307.

He let these feelings be known when he published a delayed reply to Birney's "View of the Constitution of the American Anti-Slavery Society," in an article printed in the June 20, 1839 edition of the Emancipator. Garrison claimed astonishment at the actions of his detractors. Those who had protested that Garrison was not the "mouthpiece of the Anti-Slavery Society," and denied the Society's responsibility for ideas set forth in The Liberator, now saw the Bostonian as "an unerring oracle, the Magnus Apollo of the whole land...." Garrison (obviously referring to Wright's article and others,) noted that since 1833, he had actually voted once. Now his detractors were presenting his former views and actions as a model for all abolitionists. But the Bostonian stated that he would not be made vain, and accept the "incense-offering" meant, paradoxically, to "cast him off" from the antislavery cause.[38]

John L. Thomas, in his biography of Garrison, states unequivocally that the new Massachusetts organization "was first and last an anti-Garrison society."[39] Opposition to the Thomas statement is found in a letter

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[38]Emancipator, June 20, 1839.

[39]John L. Thomas, The Liberator, William Lloyd Garrison (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1963), p. 274.

to Elizur Wright from Amos Phelps who noted the reasons for the separate Massachusetts organization to be:, "(1) the introduction of the woman question (2) political action (3) mode of representation...."[40] One must realize that while Garrison and his followers were attacked because of their beliefs, such as non-resistance, a number of their attackers were equally vilified by Garrison.[41] Some of the anti-Garrisonians held the belief that Garrison was actively endeavoring to use the antislavery societies as a means to further his conglomerate ideas which have been termed a "sort of Christian anarchism."[42] Others opposing Garrison were genuinely fearful that the course of antislavery would be ruined if Garrison's philosophies were incorporated in the national society's program.[43] The letters of Phelps and Stanton, two of the leading figures in the Massachusetts schism, indicate that these men had a sincere fear of "Garrisonianism," and their personal liking or disliking for Garrison seems of minor importance.

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[40] A.A. Phelps to Elizur Wright, June 5, 1839, Wright MSS.

[41] Emancipator, June 20, 1839.

[42] Theodore C. Smith, The Liberty and Free Soil Parties In the Northwest (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967), 2d. ed.; p. 33.

[43] H.B. Stanton to J.G. Birney, January 26, 1839, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., I, p. 481.

Albany was to be the scene of a battle between the Executive Committee of New York and the Garrisonians. The objectives of the special Albany Convention were announced in the Emancipator:

> ...devise and adopt measures, if possible, that shall unite the citizens of the free states in such political measures as are necessary, first to the rights of the free, and secondly, to adopt wise and effective constitutional measures for hastening and aiding the abolition of slavery itself.[44]

In the article the words of the August, 1838 Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society's "Address to the Abolitionists of Massachusetts, on the Subject of Political Action" were quoted, ending with the editor's plea that "the voters of the old Commonwealth" would act upon the statement's sentiments "from a sense of duty." The sentiments had been quoted out of context, (see pp. 11-12). The Massachusetts Board had proclaimed that "Politics...is a branch of morals.... Our moral convictions must follow us to the ballot box." Another comment made in the 1838 Address was quoted thusly:

> The slavery question cannot and ought not, we think to be wholly disjoined from politics. It should not be made a mere political question, but the religious and moral sense of the people must speak out on this subject with precision and authority to their political representatives.[45]

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[44] Emancipator, June 13, 1839.

[45] Ibid.

Thus, those who were advocating a more active political program on the part of abolitionists, were using the words of the Garrisonian's to dramatize their appeal.

While the national society's newspaper utilized the power of the press to kindle enthusiasm for the Albany meeting, Myron Holley employed the spoken word to arouse abolitionist's concern respecting their political duties. In a July Fourth speech, delivered at Perry, New York, Holley posed the question: "How can the principles of our government be reinstated and perpetuated?" The principles Holley spoke of were those of Washington, and Jefferson, which were, in his opinion, extolled in the Declaration of Independence. He replied to his own inquiry.

> I answer, by resorting to the same powers through which they were originally established. These powers, we have seen, were the inculcation of moral and religious truth, by precept and example, and the application of it to all the purposes of government. The practical application of truth to government is political action.[46]

The man who was to be guiding force in the establishment of the abolitionist political party, went on to reprimand those who disdained political activism as an abolitionist

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[46]Elizur Wright, Myron Holley, and What He Did For Liberty And True Religion (Printed for the author, 1882), p. 250.

doctrine. Because most politicians had betrayed their services to base practices, epithets such as "'narrow, sordid, grovelling, selfish and personal,'" had been applied to all political activities. Holley thought politics had a "'much higher meaning'" and, in order to sustain the memory of the founding fathers, had to be reclaimed.[47]

Immediately preceding the Albany Convention, William Goodell's Utica, New York, antislavery press, The Friend of Man, had published an article which revealed the general feeling toward political action held by the abolitionists of Central and Western New York State. In reply to aspersions cast on the New Yorkers by W. L. Garrison, the item noted that Garrison seemed to view the alliance of "spurious" abolitionists with those antislavery men who differed with him, as a sign that "his new views of political action are in accordance with the best interests of abolitionism...." Goodell took issue with Garrison's assumptions.

> We think he makes too much of this argument. If he were in this region, we could show him much "that is spurious under the name of abolition" that

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[47] Ibid.

> "sympathizes" more with him in his present movements, than they do with those who differ with him. We particularly speak of those who are are good and zealous abolitionists every where except where their political interests and objects come in the way. Of course they do not pretend to be "non-resistants." But it is easy to see that they would prefer the prevalence of those views among abolitionists, to the prevalence of the sentiment that bids them to vote, irrespective of party, for the friends of the slave.[48]

In contrast, those editors who agreed with Garrison were printing adamant exhortations in an alternate vain. The Herald of Freedom, a Concord, New Hampshire, abolitionist paper, stated, "We don't want abolitionists to turn politicians," and added, "We mourn to see anti-slavery bow the knee to party idols."[49]

When the antislavery men met at the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Albany, July 31, 1839, the question of how the abolitionists were to use their political influence was the major concern. Should all abolitionists be required to vote, and if so, for whom should they cast their ballots? Should independent nominations be made by the friends of emancipation? Should a separate political party, composed of abolitionists, be formed? The Albany Convention would find it necessary to consider these questions.

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[48]The Friend of Man, July 24, 1839, citing The Monroe Democrat.

[49]Emancipator, June 6, 1839, citing Herald of Freedom.

The election of Alvan Stewart as President of the convention was a blow to the Garrisonians for Stewart was an advocate of a separate political party. Garrison was in attendance and early made his presence known by protesting the exclusion of women from the convention, and refusing to actively participate in the proceedings. He issued a protest, signed by others present, which complained of the political reasons for calling the convention.[50]

William Goodell chose to advance the political activist's position. He stated that the abolitionists could not innocently neglect the political consequences of slavery, that they must set an example for the nation, and that they could not call themselves republicans and had no right to the benefits of civil government, (the purpose of which was to prevent crime,) unless they acted politically to abolish slavery. He added there could be no effective penal code while slavery existed, and that antislavery advocates had to use their political influence in order to preserve their own liberties.[51]

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[50] Ibid., August 8, 1839.

[51] Ibid., August 15, 1839.

The delegates received a letter sent from Cincinnati by Thomas Morris; he advised the assembly that "'Political action is necessary to produce moral Reformation in a nation, and that action, with us, can only be effectually exercised through the Ballot Box'" and added "'surely the Ballot Box can never be used for a more noble purpose, than to restore and secure to any man, his inalienable rights.'" [52]

In general the results of the convention were inconclusive and a "satisfaction to nobody." [53] Resolutions passed by the assembly pleaded with antislavery men to refrain from voting for those opposed to immediate emancipation, asserting that all those who had the franchise should use it, and left nominations, organization, and all other specifics to the local and state societies to devise, each to act in their own best interest.[54] A special meeting was planned for October. The locale would be Cleveland, Ohio.

Myron Holley did not wait for the Cleveland meeting to espouse his belief in the desirability of an abolitionist political party. On September 28, 1839,

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[52]Benjamin F. Morris (ed.), The Life of Thomas Morris: Pioneer and Long a Legislator of Ohio and United States Senator, 1833-39 (Cincinnati: Moore, Wilstock, Keys, Overend, 1856), p. 229.

[53]Garrison, op. cit., II, p. 310.

[54]Emancipator, August 15, 1839.

he and thirteen others met in Monroe County, New York, and held a "political convention." The delegates issued an address in which they called for the formation of a third party. Why a new party? The Monroe Address answered: Because neither of the parties in existence recognized the principles that all men are created equal; because "the new power to be arrayed" could not attain its goals without acting politically; because "no men or party" could oppose the new party without clearly placing themselves in the wrong; because the "friends of liberty" in the existing parties were concerned over the "degradation" into which those parties had fallen; and because long before "we resolved that as individuals, we are bound, by the most weighty considerations, to employ political action." The Address proclaimed these objectives:

> Let us then form a new party - not for the purpose of defeating any proper object of either of the existing parties - but for uniting with all that is most valuable in the objects of both - the incomparably greater object, of securing, with both - the equal and paternal care, the universal rights and interests of all the states, and all the people of our glorious Union.[55]

Holley and his friends at Rochester had not proposed

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[55] Ibid., October 24, 1839.

specific independent nominations for national offices. Yet this was their ultimate aim. The group hoped to influence the forthcoming special meeting at Cleveland by arousing interest in the formation of a distinct party, and requested the Cleveland Convention to make independent nominations.[56]

On October 10, 1839, the editor of the Emancipator, Leavitt, published an article which revealed the influence of Holley's writings, speeches, and resolutions. On the subject of independent nominations, Leavitt stated that he had "maintained a long and earnest mental struggle against the proposition," but although he was not yet convinced of the necessity of a "general movement," this view was being weakened daily by the "reiterated abuses of the cause" by politicians. If political action was necessary for the accomplishment of abolitionist goals, the American Society's Constitution, wrote Leavitt, required abolitionists to "do all that is lawfully" within their power for the abolition of slavery.[57]

Leavitt's remarks were a preface for an article entitled, "The Crisis," penned by Holley, and originally

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[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid., October 10, 1839.

published in the Rochester Freeman. Holley's persuasiveness was effective for Leavitt remarked, "we confess that the considerations he has presented, have done more than anything...to remove our objections and carry our convictions to the result he aims at."[58]

Holley's convincing essay termed a distinct political party for antislavery men "indespensable to the success of abolitionism...." To those who objected to the formation of a separate abolitionist party, Holley declared:

> All of the objections now existing against this course, when explored to their seminal principles, will be seen to result from a considerable and injurious distrust of the people, or from a visionary reliance upon miraculous interposition of heaven, to abolish slavery. Men of practical good sense, with reasonable knowledge of our people and their circumstances, can no longer consent to yield to them.[59]

He continued his exposition with an analysis of civil government. He argued that civil government was moral, necessary, valuable, and an indispensable religious obligation. The necessity for civil government, wrote Holley, "is founded upon its fitness to secure human rights," and a religious obligation, necessary to the

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

"security of our rights."[60]

Those who favored independent nominations were becoming more numerous. In September, an Oswego County, New York, antislavery convention unanimously adopted a resolution which stated that the time had come for abolitionists to associate in a separate party.[61] In October, the Massachusetts Abolitionist came out favor of a "Human Rights Party."[62] At Dutchess County, New York, a meeting of abolitionists proposed the organization of a "Free Party."[63]

In late October the convention met at Cleveland, but its hoped-for national significance was weakened when it was determined that 360 of the 400 in attendance were residents of Ohio. Henry Stanton gave an account of the proceedings in a letter to Elizur Wright. Stanton informed Wright that Myron Holley had "brought forward the subject" of independent antislavery nominations for President and Vice-President. The discussion, wrote Stanton, lasted a full day and evening. After disclosing that Holley's proposal was "finally laid on the table,"

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[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid., October 17, 1839.

[62] Ibid., October 24, 1839.

[63] Ibid., November 17, 1839.

Stanton gave his main reason for voting for "this disposition of it...."

> ...to have nominated candidates would have been a surprize on the great mass of our friends. Nothing of the kind was intimated in the call.[64]

Stanton continued with an explicit explanation of his negativism concerning Holley's motion. He noted that:

> It was a local meeting, called for special objects at the West - It was local in its representation being confined chiefly to Ohio. The measure was as extraordinary as would have been a dissolution of the Society.... A nomination made before we see whether the parties will put up any body for whom we can go would, by the mass of our friends have been deemed premature.... It would have been thought a trick; getting away out here & doing what we knew we could not do at the Center.[65]

Stanton then presented his plan of action to Wright. He would wait until both parties had named their candidates. If Clay and Martin Van Buren were nominated, he would call a "great" convention to discuss the "wisdom of nominating." Stanton believed this would "go strong," fearing "anything short of this would split the Society," and prove a failure.[66]

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[64] H.B. Stanton to Elizur Wright, October 28, 1839, Wright MSS.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

Stanton's closing lines led to a controversial issue when the correspondence between Wright and himself came to the attention of Garrison. Stanton informed Wright, "The meeting was a grand one. 400 delegates. No miserable woman question, non-resistance, nor 15 minutes rule to perplex, confound & gag us."[67] In his biography of Myron Holley, which contains the above letter, Elizur Wright inserted a preceeding notation explaining that the letter to Stanton, which evoked the above response, was stolen.

> This letter was strictly confidential, and rather hasty. Of course, it was not laid before the Convention. But being stolen from Mr. Stanton's hat while dining at a hotel, it was soon after published in the Liberator, as an effective missile against the "new organization."[68]

Subsequently, Wright's letter fell into Garrison's hands. Garrison's sons deny that the Wright letter was stolen from Stanton, and present, in a biography of their father, a letter from Mr. Lyman Crowl of Ohio, who informed Garrison of Wright's letter and explained how it came into his possession. A note addressed to Garrison and

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[67] Ibid.

[68] Wright, op. cit., p. 253.

dated November 14, 1839, at Ohio City, was sent along with Crowl's explanation to Garrison. The unsigned, Ohio City letter claimed that Wright's letter fell into the writer's hands "accidentally." Crowl wrote Garrison that the person who discovered the letter wanted to remain anonymous since "his connection with the Society" in Ohio was such that he was fearful that if his name became publicly known, through accident, the results would probably be "hardness between some of the friends of abolition in Massachusetts and Ohio," and also "between the friends of the cause in New York and Ohio, etc."[69] Garrison called for the publication of Wright's letter and thereafter the communication was printed in both the Massachusetts Abolitionist and Garrison's Liberator.

Wright's "streak letter" as it was called,(the note began, "Saw only the streak of you as you passed here.",) sent to Stanton on October 12, 1839, from Dorchester, Massachusetts, was powder for Garrison's anti-new organization, anti-abolitionist political party cannon owing to several key phrases. Wright prodded Stanton with a plea to "urge the American Society at Cleveland to take a decided step towards Presidential

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[69]Garrison, op. cit., II, pp. 315-316.

andidates." Wright, convinced that the antislavery ause would be "half lost" without nominations, reminded tanton that independent nominations was a "step which e have always contemplated as one which Providence ight force upon us." Asserting that there were "men nough if they will only stand," Wright thought that hould the political movement be handled "judiciously and deliberately," there would be "no difficulty." He was not worried about the lack of fame of the proposed candidates because, provided they were of "good stuff," their promoters could "manufacture their notoriety" as they went along.[70]

A list of the benefits of independent abolitionist political action was included by Wright. Among the advantages he mentioned practicality, consistency, concert of action, ennoblement of politics, an increase of interest, discussion and liberality, and "terror to the hearts of the South." Most important to Garrison's crusade against the new organization in Massachusetts were excerpts from Wright's comminque in which he stated:

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[70] Ibid., p. 317.

> One thing I know. Unless you do take such a step, OUR NEW ORGANIZATION HERE IS A GONE CASE. It has been, inter nos, SHOCKINGLY MISMANAGED. Everything has been made to turn upon the woman question. The political has been left to fall out of sight.[71]

Wright added that if the parent society would initiate the third party movement, the woman question would be forgotten. He thought that the real issue causing animosities between the two Massachusetts groups was the Garrisonian's belief in non-resistance. The woman question was of secondary importance.[72]

The sensation caused by the publication of Wright's letter subsided rather quickly for on December 21, 1839, Stanton, writing from New York, congratulated Wright on his handling of the affair, and informed him that "the friends" in New York thought Garrison's extracts on the letter were "most disgraceful," and that "the plot as developed by him was S.P. small potatoes." Stanton adhered to the opinion that the letter was obtained without his consent or knowledge.[73] Earlier in the same month Stanton agreed with Wright that the "brethren of the new organization" had made "everything to turn on the confounded woman question." Stanton

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[71] Ibid., pp. 317-318.

[72] Ibid., p. 318.

[73] H.B. Stanton to Elizur Wright, December 21, 1839, Wright MSS.

stated that he "never split" with the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society on the woman question. On that issue, he thought they were right.[74]

While the Massachusetts combatants were waging newspaper warfare, a state convention, meeting November 13 to 14, in Warsaw, Genessee County, New York, had passed a resolution which called for an independent party. The delegates judged that duty and expediency required abolitionists to act as "Christian freemen," and to organize a distinct political party, nominate candidates, and sustain them by public suffrage.[75]

Although an abolitionist party was not formally organized by the Warsaw "Friends of Abolition," candidates for the offices of President and Vice-President of the United States were nominated. Myron Holley, vice-president of the convention, headed the committee of correspondence delegated to inform the nominees of the honor bestowed upon them. Both nominees, James Gillespie Birney, and Francis Julius LeMoyne, refused acceptance of their nominations for President and Vice-President respectively.

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[74] H.B. Stanton to Elizur Wright, December 5, 1839, Wright MSS.

[75] Emancipator, November 28, 1839.

LeMoyne, in a letter to Birney dated December 10, 1839, noted collateral questions, and their effects upon the incongruous band of antislavery men would be disastrous for the "single object" of abolition. Stating that he did not "sanction the proceedings" of the Western New Yorkers, LeMoyne reasoned that their action was "inexpedient and premature." He then noted the facts upon which he based his conclusion. Dr. LeMoyne thought the abolitionists ill-prepared for a political movement, and added that even if prepared and united, the abolitionists were too small in numbers to evade "ridicule and taunts." Distraction from the cause of the slave would result, stated the Pennsylvania physician, for dissension would come about as the antislavery body was not in full accord concerning the matter. He was also of the opinion that a majority of the American abolitionists were "opposed to the measure." Added to the above improprieties of political organization, LeMoyne saw the abolition enterprise as "emphatically religious" in nature, and worried that the past efforts, directed toward moral suasion, would show a "want of confidence, and somewhat in the propriety" of the prior actions of antislavery men. Diversion of the cause into the political mainstream would result, he believed, in the abandonment of "the means most to be relied upon in

attainment" of abolitionist's goals.[76]

For his prime motive in refusing the Warsaw nomination Birney, in his letter of declination, cited disagreement among abolitionists on the subject of political action. The former Kentucky slaveholder was in agreement with the action of the convention but disagreed with their timing, for he stated:

> That there does not exist among us at present the requisite harmony of views on this subject is apparent from the earnest discussion which is now going on in our papers. That the discussion will eventuate in a general consent to independent nominations I have not much doubt. In order that this result may be brought about in the speediest and most effectual manner, every impediment to the freest examination of the whole subject ought to be removed. An existing nomination would be felt as fettering those who were favorable to the particular persons nominated....[77]

Birney referred to the lack of harmony among abolitionists revealed in the movement's various newspapers. Scanning the leading abolitionist newspapers of the years 1839 and 1840 one is readily aware of the reluctance the nominee felt owing to the pronounced disagreement within the antislavery ranks.

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[76] F.J. LeMoyne to J.G. Birney, December 10, 1839, Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., I, pp. 511-513.

[77] J.G. Birney to Myron Holley, Joshua Darling, and Josiah Andrews, December 17, 1839, Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., p. 515.

In the Northwest there was general agreement that voting was a duty. There was little discussion on the questions of non-voting and no-government, as opposed to the many confrontations which occurred over these issues in the East.[78] However, in 1839, extremist positions, be they Garrison's or Holley's met with disapproval in the Northwest. Dr. Gamaliel Bailey, editor of The Philanthropist, organ of the Ohio State Anti-Slavery Society, opposed the idea of independent nominations vehemently. In April, 1839, Bailey editorialized at great length on his objections to a distinct abolitionist political party. "We have always been hostile to this suggestion, for various reasons...." adding that in order to form a separate party, abolitionists would have to reorganize and create a new organization, based not on opposition to slavery's existence in the states, but on enmity toward slavery in the District of Columbia and the American slave trade. He reasoned that abolitionists could "exert no rightful political power" over the slave states, (he believed slavery was a creature of municipal law,) and that the issue of Southern slavery would no longer be a "legitimate subject of action" for the anti-slavery societies since it would be viewed as a political rather than a moral issue, the moral influence of the movement would subside and their "hold on the consciences

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[78]Smith, loc. cit.

of the Southern people" would be forfeited.[79]

Added to these objections, Bailey thought that "subordinate objects" would overshadow the "present leading object," and that "strife for office" among abolitionists would ensue, "bad passions," "demagogueism," loss of principle, and last, expediency would result. Dr. Bailey was opposed not only to the transformation of the abolitionist organization into a political organization, but ojected, as he stated, "to every measure that tends to give it even indirectly a political aspect." Because of the mistrust engendered in the minds of politicians by the political activities of abolitionists, Bailey believed that "...whatever is done politically, should be done by Abolitionists, as individuals, as American citizens, and not in their organized capacity, as Abolitionists."[80] Thus, Bailey feared that the diverse elements within the Whig and Democratic parties would join hands to defeat an abolitionist party. If abolitionists organized as a separate political entity, their movement would be subjected to the criticism of the other parties, since the antislavery men would have to vacate their moral position in order to invade the world of politics.

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[79] The Philanthropist, [Cincinnati] , April 30, 1839.

[80] Ibid.

Shocked by Alvan Stewart's suggestion, made at the Fifth Anniversary meeting of the parent society, that the Society's constitution be altered so as to refute the constitutionality of slavery in all the states, Bailey adhered to the opinion that the extinction of slavery in the South could be accomplished by the Society only through moral means. The Cincinnati editor saw the coming of a "liberal political party" founded on the sentiments exhibited in the Declaration of Independence, with its main object being the circumscription of the "encroachments of the slaveholding power," and the use of "direct legislative action" to achieve these goals. This action would always be within the strictures of the United States Constitution, and would not be concerned with servitude in the slave states. The abolitionist societies would exclude themselves from political activities as a group, and would work for universal emancipation by "awakening religious sentiment" thoughout the South.[81]

Throughout the nation, abolitionists, individually and conjunctively, were voicing their opinions on the subject of a separate party. After the October convention in Cleveland, John Heaton, in a letter to the New Lisbon

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[81] Ibid.

(Ohio) Aurora, noted that opposition to a separate organization was made because the corruptness inherent in the existing parties could plague the abolitionists should they enter "the arena of political strife." [82] The Philanthropist was confident that "The abolitionists of Ohio,...are very generally opposed to a distinct organization."[83] Ohio residents were also informed in an "Address of the Western Reserve Anti-Slavery Convention to the Citizens of the Western Reserve" that the convention's object was "not the formation of a distinct political party," and added that "Such a design we now disclaim, as we have always disclaimed it."[84] An Illinois Abolitionist Convention, meeting in Canton, December, 1839, resolved that its members were "averse to the organization of an anti-slavery party...."[85] Since Illinois antislavery men were "few and scattered," they were reluctant to act independently.[86]

Eastern abolitionist's attitudes toward a separate party were more varied than those in the West. Three groups of thought on the subject were apparent in that

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[82] The Friend of Man, November 13, 1839.

[83] Ibid.

[84] The Liberator, November 1, 1839.

[85] Emancipator, January 2, 1840.

[86] Smith, op. cit., p. 32.

region. Garrison and his followers, avowed non-resistants, adamantly opposed the formation of a distinct party; another faction agreed with Holley's ideas and actions. Others thought that a party should be formed, but were not convinced that its organization should commence immediately since abolitionists could not reach unanimity on the matter.

Nathaniel P. Rogers, editor of the Concord, New Hampshire Herald of Freedom, and a Garrisonian, published his views on political action.

> For our own part we fear a political party, or even a party to carry anti-slavery ends by means of office holding. An office holder is the best man in the community, by position, to do right. He becomes a mere shadow, an echo.[87]

Henry C. Wright, another Garrison admirer, in a December, 1839, letter, accused the clergy of promoting political abolitionism in order to relieve themselves of their duty to speak out against slavery. "Clergymen," noted Wright, have "urged it as their great reason for keeping the question of abolition out of the pulpit and the church, that it is a political question." In obvious reference to the Massachusetts Abolition Society, an organization abouding with clergymen, Wright lumped political

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[87] Emancipator, November 29, 1839, citing Herald of Freedom.

activism, clergymen, and the new organization into one despicable group when he stated that the clergy was making a "last and desperate effort" to avoid speaking out for the slave. Clergymen understood that if the abolition enterprise could be introduced into the "arena of political strife and party politics," antislavery would cease to be regarded as a moral and religious cause.[88]

A Hartford County Society convention, meeting at Farmington, Connecticut, December 25, 1839, showed opposition toward the formation of a separate party. The Connecticut group looked with disdain upon any attempt to reduce the society's benevolent cause to one of narrow limits, as exemplified in religious sects and political parties. At a meeting of the Connecticut Anti-Slavery Society, in January, 1840, a resolution was passed with but one voter dissenting which termed an antislavery party "unwise, inexpedient, and wholly unnecessary...." In fact, the state society deemed such a party an impediment to antislavery operations.[89]

Not surprisingly, vehement opposition to the separate party movement was voiced in a resolution passed by the

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[88] Emancipator, December 13, 1839.

[89] Charter Oak, [Hartford], January, 1840.

Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society at their January 22, 1840, Eighth Annual meeting. Characterizing the third party movement as "fraught with nearly unmitigated evil and mischief to the abolition enterprise," the Society deemed the party proposal as calculated "to bring upon ourselves,...the contempt of both the great political parties, instead of that respect which both are now compelled to feel for us."[90]

Leading the opposition in Massachusetts, Garrison and his colleagues on the Massachusetts Society's Board of Managers issued an address similar to their 1838 address on political action. The Board noted numerous reasons for opposing a distinct party. First, the managers reminded abolitionists that at the Fifth Annual meeting of the national society, resolutions were passed which opposed a distinct party. Should these resolves be overturned, the antislavery organizations would be open to the charge of inconsistency. The common warnings of division, and weakening of abolitionist political strength, intrusion of "unprinciples aspirants" into the ranks, and the apparent denial of the efficacy of moral suasion were presented. Also, warned the Board, the "present disinterested aspect" of the antislavery cause would be altered "in the eyes of

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[90] Ibid., February, 1840.

those who are endeavoring to find some pretext for its overthrow," and thus would "lose its hold upon individual and public conscience." The Bay Staters added that "in all probability," the pulpit would be induced "to plead less frequently, and far less efficaciously, in favor of the anti-slavery cause...." The party was labeled a "hazardous experiment" that would result in bringing about the complete hostility of both existing parties toward the abolitionist cause.[91]

The Garrisonians and the Westerners, however, were not the only abolitionists against a distinct party. Although a decided opponent of many of Garrison's views, Lewis Tappan, the wealthy New York philanthropist who served on the national society's Executive Committee, did not favor the separate party plan in 1839. Tappan, in a letter to Joshua Leavitt, set forth the basis for his and the American Society Executive Committee's stand on third party action. Many of Tappan's arguments were a reiteration of those set forth by the Massachusetts Board. Tappan added to the objections of the Garrisonians the propositions that the abolitionists would lose their balance of power position, and would "dilute,...the quality

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[91] Emancipator, November 7, 1839.

of our Anti-Slavery feelings, faith and zeal" through "association with political agitators." Asserting that "moral reformers may change the character of political partizans" but not vice versa, Tappan proposed that because of the "constitution of man" political action "is apt to be an absorbing principle to the neglect of moral and religious efforts." Tappan professed faith in the independent voting habits of abolitionists and reasoned that balance of power politics would "ultimately bring to terms the leaders in both of the present great political parties of the country." A separate political organization would not only aggravate against the cause "the party feelings" of leading politicians throughout America, but would also result in the loss of the "sympathy, prayers, and aid of abolitionists in other countries."[92]

Perhaps the most convincing argument Tappan promoted was a reminder to abolitionists that the objectives of emancipation in the District of Columbia, and the states, to be brought about by political action, were just a "part" of the Society's object; another aim of abolitionism was "to bring slaveholders to repentance of

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[92] Ibid., November 14, 1839.

the sin of slaveholding." Tappan predicted this aim would be "lost sight of" in separate political action.[93] Thus, Tappan's opposition to a third party was primarily motivated by religious sentiments.

Not all antislavery men saw a clear cut right or wrong in the independent party propositions as did Garrison, Tappan, and Bailey in 1839. William Goodell, the Utica editor, was as yet convinced of neither the efficacy nor the morality of independent nominations. In December, 1839, Goodell remarked, "If abolitionists have not already acquired stability and faithfulness of purpose, the mere making of separate nominations will not give it to them."[94] From February to April, 1840, Goodell published editorials concerning independent nominations which indicated his state of mind on the issue. In January, Goodell still possessed fears over the question, but stated that a distinct organization or independent nominations might be "useful to the cause" if they were "properly conducted and in connexion with, and in subserviency to other means." One of Goodell's complaints was that too "little confidence" was "placed in the moral sense" of the nation's voters while too much

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[93] Ibid.

[94] The Friend of Man, December 11, 1839.

dependence was alloted to the "ordinary machinery of a political party, to produce uniformity of political action." Disapproving the corruptness of politics, Goodell forewarned that the work of protecting the independent nominations and any resulting abolitionist political organization from the "false maxims and unprincipled policy" which pervaded the existing parties would "require more skill and discrimination than anything to which abolitionists have been yet called." The Utica editor compared the systems of caucuses and conventions with the simpler method practiced in England and in the early years of the American Republic. While advocating the "usages of forty years ago" Goodell admitted that "convention nominations" might be "established upon better principles," and spared the corruptness that he thought existed.[95]

By March Goodell must have sensed that an abolitionist party was definitely in the offing, for he outlined a "system of associated action" which, with cultivation, "might,...answer the purposes of the abolitionists," at least for a few years.[96] Goodell stated that the common

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[95] Ibid., February 12, February 26, March 4, 1840.

[96] Ibid., March 11, 1840.

attitude of "all is fair in politics," must be discarded. The choice of a candidate, no matter how decided, should not rely on his ability to garner votes, but on his just principles. Those abolitionists who could not bring themselves to support the party's nominee should not be castigated or reproached. To Goodell the total object for which civil government was initially formed was "to execute judgment between man and his neighbors," and abolitionists, he cautioned, must accept no lesser object for their own.[97]

Convinced that reformation of the existing parties, and hope for support from within the slave states were futile desires, Goodell concluded that the balance of power mode of political action would "require as much political arrangement and finesse" to influence either or both existing parties as would an independent party formed in the manner he advocated.[98] He suggested that rather than organize a third party, "ALL HONEST AND INDEPENDENT FREEMEN" should unite in opposition to party and slavery. How was this to be accomplished with an established party?

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[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid., March 18, 1840.

> By proposing no partial or partisan objects. By pursuing no partisan measures. Men may call us partisans, but that will not make us such. So long as we seek the best good of ALL, and use frank, honest, liberal and free measures, open to the inspection and worthy of the approval of all, we shall never sink to the level of "party."[99]

Goodell's inclination to utilize semantics led him to an explanation of what he desired of an abolitionist political organization. The antislavery group should act individually rather than in a representative capacity. No support should be pledged to a candidate in advance. Only the best man, not the most popular or the less of two evils, would be nominated. [100] Goodell labeled those who could not adopt his plan as "partisans, political capitalizers" or "no-governmenters."[101]

Poet and editor of the Pennsylvania Freeman, John Greenleaf Whittier, was another antislavery leader who would not decide the question of political action hastily. Whittier had no objection to local independent nominations, where this action was considered expedient, as long as they were made by individual citizens rather than by abolitionist societies. Yet, in early 1840, he was an opponent of nominations for national office. He based

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[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid., April 1, 1840.

his opposition on the sole grounds that the action would be inexpedient. Whittier reasoned that sufficient discussion of the subject had not been aired. Also the clergy would be alienated from the movement, and divisiveness within the ranks would result from the inclusion of party men if national nominations were presently advanced.[102] A resolution adopted by the Western Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society exemplified the views of Whittier as well as that Society's opinion. The group resolved that an antislavery party seemed "exceedingly unwise and impolitic," at least at the present time.[103]

Gerrit Smith was another antislavery advocate hesitant about supporting a separate party for abolitionists. By late 1839, however, Smith announced that he would "no longer oppose the organization of an abolition political party." Although he was still apprehensive of the possible loss of the cause's "purity and power," Smith was convinced that attempts to curb the leading New York abolitionists in their party movement would be useless.[104] Since the movement could not be stopped, he chose not to hinder its backers efforts. Smith wavered on many issues. His inconsistency became a regular occurrence.

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[102] Ibid., January 1, 1840, citing Pennsylvania Freeman.

[103] The Liberator, January 17, 1840.

[104] The Friend of Man, November 20, 1839.

Smith believed seven-eighths of his state's abolitionists backed the new party movement, (Goodell disagreed). Now, said Smith, the only hope he had was that society meetings would not be encumbered with the organization or conduction of the party. The Peterboro, New York, resident charged that more than any other cause, the "treachery of abolitionists" had given rise to "the loud and general call for an abolition political party." Smith meant that by failing to support antislavery candidates of the existing parties, and by binding themselves to the nominees and policies of their own parties, abolitionists had failed their antislavery principles. Although not a separate party advocated, Smith concluded that if the proposed party was faithful to antislavery principles, it would "hasten the success and final triumph" of the abolitionist cause. By early 1840, Smith had decided that any possible detriment to the "purity" of antislavery principles, threatened by an independent party, was "no greater than that which has attended our hanging on the skirts of party, under the interrogation system."[105]

Henry B. Stanton also questioned the timeliness of independent nominations. In a letter to Amos Phelps,

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[105] The Friend of Man, November 20, 1839, and February 19, 1840.

Stanton referred to several letters he had viewed which concerned a circular Charles Torrey had sent to various abolitionists. In the circular, Torrey informed its recipients of a presidential nominating convention to be held in New York City in the spring of 1840. Torrey claimed in his communications that consultation concerning the proposed convention call had occurred between himself and the leaders in New York and Boston. Stanton labeled Torrey's assertions "a bad business." While certain Torrey had not intended to mislead anyone, Stanton asserted that "Brother" Torrey had conveyed a "wrong impression." Stanton claimed that the New York leaders had not assented to a meeting for the designated purposes. He doubted that Judge William Jay or Lewis Tappan had ever been consulted about the matter, and knew that they were "dead set against the whole thing." Joshua Leavitt informed Stanton that he had not authorized Torrey to use his name as a promoter of the call. James G. Birney, favoring the move if there was accord among abolitionists on the issue, had not given his "assent to the project of calling a convention in the way proposed," and certainly had not designated Torrey as the promulgator of such a call. Stanton had related his opinion, that the time for such a nomination was not auspices, to Torrey. The parent society secretary,

while not opposed to a convention called for the purpose of discussing "the propriety of making a nomination;" felt that "leading friends" of the American Society should be consulted before such a call was made. Stanton warned Phelps that a minority move, activated without the counsel of those outside New York and Boston, could impede the course of political action and would definitely do it "no good."[106]

The separate party movement had its advocates as well as its antagonists and hesitants. Alvan Stewart, an early promoter of a distinct party, called for the inception of such an organization in a letter to Joshua Leavitt's Emancipator. Stewart advised that abolitionists could not ally with the existing parties because they did not espouse the great object of the abolitionists, that being the "enfranchisement of man."[107]

Although not a political party advocate for many months, Joshua Leavitt felt compelled to present his reasons for his now apparent belief in the need for such an organization. Writing in December, 1839, Leavitt argued that an independent party was the "only course... consistent with their [abolitionists] principles, and

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[106]H.B. Stanton to Amos Phelps, February 4, 1840, Wright MSS.

[107]The Friend of Man, January 1, 1840, citing Emancipator.

therefore ought to have been adopted from the beginning of the abolition enterprise." Reliance on the existing parties to nominate candidates who might be trusted to "do justice to the principles of abolitionists" had proven to be a fallacious and absurd attitude.[108]

In Massachusetts, the new organization members were in sympathy with Holley, Stewart, and Leavitt. While a backer of an independent party, Charles T. Torrey also exhibited agreement with Whittier and Smith on the subject of keeping the party and the societies separate. "The Human Rights party!" "Haste happy day!" exclaimed Torrey in a letter to Elizur Wright. He continued, "We must, however, adopt some plan,...to keep the political separate from the Society machinery - or we shall run ashore where the Garrisonites predict."[109]

Orange Scott, a Methodist minister and new organization member, lamented Lewis Tappan's opposition to the party but was not fearful of any repercussions to the movement's progress. In a letter to Wright, Scott noted that good would come of the disagreements concerning an

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[108] Emancipator, December 26, 1839.

[109] C.T. Torrey to Elizur Wright, November 9, 1839, Wright MSS.

abolitionist party, since the topic needed discussion.[110]

James G. Birney, in his letter to the Warsaw Committee, had pronounced his reasons for declining their nomination as being the lack of complete accord among abolitionists on the subject and the untimeliness of such a course. In a later communication to Holley, Birney added that he feared his nomination was not supported by leaders in the Society, for Leavitt, Wright, and Smith were in favor of a better known, more effective candidate. Also, the Warsaw nominee noted that none of the antislavery papers had exhibited "the slightest commendation of the particular person nominated." Birney now offered to withdraw his declination letter, and therefore leave the committee's offer unanswered "to await future action."[111] Obviously, Birney entertained hopes that a convention, more national in scope than that at Warsaw, would be convened, and that he would receive its nomination.

In response to Birney's second letter, Myron Holley wrote that his views had been strengthened, and for the sake of consistency, those abolitionists who favored civil

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[110]Orange Scott to Elizur Wright, November 28, 1839, Wright MSS.

[111]J.G. Birney to Myron Holley, December 26, 1839, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., I, pp. 516-517.

government were obliged to form a new political organization. Holley felt that the majority's inclination against such an organization could be explained by the prevalence of the "heresy that opposes all human government." He proposed that the nominations made at Warsaw be repeated for Birney remained his choice for the higher office. Holley castigated the abolitionist newspapers for their lack of leadership on the political question. The New Yorker agreed with the sentiments Leavitt had recently expressed in the Emancipator, and predicted the political movement would "get on well" if the Friend of Man and the Pennsylvania Freeman would follow Leavitt's course. Holley did not expect commendation of the independent nominations project or its nominees from the newspapers until a "few leading "ones" took "decided ground." Holley declared, "Those in favor of the movement are yet hesitating, while those opposed are decided."[112]

Holley's belief in the desirability of abolitionist nominations was indeed strengthened for in January , 1840, he and over six hundred antislavery men of Western New York and Pennsylvania held a convention at Arcade, Genesee

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[112]Myron Holley to J.G. Birney, January 1, 1840, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., I, pp. 518-519.

County, New York. Resolutions adopted by the January 28 to 29 meeting rebuked the Whig and Democrat nominees for President, William Henry Harrison and Martin Van Buren, for their compliance with the proslavery elements. Abolitionists were called upon to deny their votes to the two candidates. The Arcade Resolutions also admonished "the legislator who opposes the repeal of slavery,...the minister who refuses to preach and pray for the perishing slave - and the professed abolitionist who votes for the one and patronizes the other...." The basis for an antislavery political organization was presented in the form of a resolution:

> ...by the provisions of the Constitution and by the influence of the constituted authorities of the nation upon northern money, northern industry, northern safety, and northern principles, the northern states are vitally interested in all the slavery existing in the United States, and bound by every feeling of self-respect, humanity and patriotism, to labor for its abolition.[113]

Since the Warsaw nominations had been declined by Birney and LeMoyne, and the new party's organization was as yet in doubt, the delegates at Arcade issued a call for an independent party. The convention called for a meeting to nominate independent candidates for the highest national offices, and with the following resolution announced their

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[113] Emancipator, February 13, 1840.

reasoning for such. The resolve stated:

> ...in our judgment, the anti-slavery electors of the United States are bound, by all their regard to the civil and religious rights of the great American people, forthwith to form themselves into an independent political party for the more effectual support of those rights.... [114]

A week after the Arcade meeting Holley's proposal for independent nominations for national office was voted down two to one by a state antislavery convention at Bloomfield, Ontario County, New York.[115] The action did not obliterate Holley's hopes for the call for a national convention was heeded.

On April 1, 1840, a convention of 121 members representing 6 states assembled at the Albany, New York City Hall. Elected officials of the assembled included Alvan Stewart, serving as president, Charles T. Torrey, a vice-president, and Joshua Leavitt, one of the convention's secretaries. A committee on business and resolutions headed by Myron Holley, also included Leavitt and Elizur Wright. Holley presented his resolutions advocating independent nominations which met with opposition on the party of delegates principally from Albany and Troy, New York.

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[114] Ibid.

[115] The Friend of Man, February 19, 1840.

wever, when a vote was taken, 44 of the 121 present
clined to record their opinions.[116] One of the resolves
opted by the assembly proclaimed that it was the duty
all abolitionists to abstain from supporting "a first,
cond, or third party," and rather that they should
nite as patriots, philanthropists and Christians, to
t down the slaveocracy of all parties, and put up the
inciples of the Declaration of Independence...." This
ity should be apparent "at the ballot box and everywhere,
every lawful, constitutional, moral and religious
fluence."[117]

Nominations were approved and the Committee of
rrespondence, (Stewart, Smith, and Goodell,) was instructed
inform James G. Birney of New York, and Thomas Earle
Pennsylvania that their names had been proposed as
ie abolitionist presidential and vice-presidential candi-
ites. Of the seventy-six votes cast by the conventioneers,
orty-three were in favor of independent nominations, and
hirty-three opposed the measure.

Garrison promptly composed a scathing attack on
he convention and its proceedings. Editorializing in

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[116] Wright, op. cit., p. 262.

[117] Emancipator, April 9, 1840.

the Liberator's columns, Garrison predicted that "the good sense and sound discretion" of Birney and Earle would prompt them to decline the nominations. The scant majority of eleven votes which carried the nomination proposal was ridiculed by Garrison as was the fact that of the 121 members present at the convention only 17 were residents of states other than New York. None of those present were from as far west as Pennsylvania.[118]

However, Garrison erred in his prediction that Birney and Earle would turn down the nominations. Correspondence between Birney and Gamaliel Bailey, during the early months of 1840, indicated that Birney was decidedly in favor of the immediate formation of an independent party. In February, Bailey had inquired of Birney's attitude toward William H. Harrison, the recently named Whig candidate for the presidency. Bailey considered Harrison "the candidate of the free states," and believed the defeat of Van Buren would be "a triumph over the slave-states." The defeat of the former President could be accomplished only by Harrison's election. While Bailey considered himself as being more of a "real Democrat" than a supporter of Whig doctrines on matters of public policy, he would

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[118]The Liberator, April 10, 1840.

back Harrison's candidacy in order to defeat Van Buren. He asked Birney about his attitude toward Harrison since Birney was "committed in favor of a third party" and would probably take an "unfavorable" view of both candidates.[119]

Less than two weeks past when Bailey wrote Birney that he felt "more and more anxious about the effect" of the third party scheme. The Cincinnati editor was convinced that abolitionists, whether acting within or without the framework of their own political party, could achieve their goals only through the policy of the two major parties, since an abolitionist party's candidates would never, in his opinion, accede to powerful positions. Bailey saw nothing "so terribly depraved" in the Whig party that would cause antislavery men to lose all hope that it would act in accordance with their programs. Bailey presented this proposition concerning the Whig party:

> Suppose by its policy it should secure the support of the abolitionists and succeed in defeating the Democracy [Democratic party] in the free states, who does not see at once that the defeated party would cut loose from slavery, and begin also to shape its policy with an eye to the demands of abolitionists?[120]

Bailey pleaded with Birney to postpone his independent

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[119]Gamaliel Bailey to J.G. Birney, February 21, 1840, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., I, pp. 531-532.

[120]Gamaliel Bailey to J.G. Birney, March 3, 1840, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., I, pp. 535-536.

nomination plans, being prepared to "bring the whole subject of a separate party before the Abolitionists of the West, (with the strongest arguments that have been offered in its favor,), during the coming summer," if Birney would delay his project.[121]

Henry B. Stanton also feared the consequences of independent nominations. He informed Birney that the issue was now "making havoc with the new organization, and especially with the Mass. Abolitionist." Since the Society and newspaper had identified with the new party movement approximately one thousand subscriptions had been canceled. If a nomination was made at Albany and the Abolitionist backed such a move, (and Stanton said it must,) the paper would "be nearly prostrate by fall." Assured that "19/20ths of the Abolitionists of all sides" in Massachusetts were opposed to an "independent national nomination this year," Stanton warned that such a ticket would not receive five hundred votes in the Bay State. Stanton believed the nomination question was strengthening Garrison's influence, yet he also worried that if the Albany Convention did not make nominations, "Garrison and Co." would regard such a course as "their triumph."

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[121] Ibid., p. 538.

Stanton's views concerning the possible success of independent nominations can be derived from his statement on the coming election.

> Our friends are mostly Whigs. The Whigs now think there is a good prospect of success. They would wade to their armpits in molten lava to drive Van Buren from power. Abolitionist Whigs partake in this feeling largely. The crisis passes away with the fall election whichever party succeeds. Why spend all our energies then, in goading these men without any prospect of good to them or us?[122]

Stanton wanted to postpone nominating abolition candidates for he thought that whereas their chances were nil in 1840, antislavery men might succeed in 1844.

After the Albany Convention, Whittier advised Birney to decline the nomination. The small attendance at Albany and the slight majority by which the independent nominations proposal had past, led Whittier to believe that the abolitionists were not prepared for such a move. He estimated that, in his state, no more than five hundred votes could be garnered by the antislavery party.[123]

Bailey predicting that the nominations would not be supported by the abolitionists, mourned the "premature movement" which would "prejudice" the cause and incur an

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[122] H.B. Stanton to J.G. Birney, March 21, 1840, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., I, pp. 541-543.

[123] J.G. Whittier to J.G. Birney, April 16, 1840, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., I, p. 555.

"irretrievable breach" in their ranks. He also regretted the convention's actions for they gave Garrison "an advantage he would not otherwise have. Had your third party friends waited till after the approaching election," predicted Bailey, "I do not believe they would have met with opposition from any editor but Garrison."[124] In the columns of The Philanthropist, Bailey made known his disappointment in the Albany proceedings.

> Our friendship for Mr. Birney, and our high estimation of his judgment and capacity for government, make us regret that he should have been selected, as an altar on which to sacrifice a few votes.[125]

Birney considered the Albany offer and its detractor's opinions, and waited over a month to make his acceptance public. May 11 he decided to write the Committee of his decision since he was preparing to sail for England where he would attend a World Antislavery Convention. In his communication, he outlined the causes for his readiness to accept the presidential nomination of an abolitionist political organization.

Basically, Birney was convinced that he was well qualified in all respects to represent the political

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[124] Gamaliel Bailey to J.G. Birney, April 18, 1840, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., I, p. 556.

[125] The Philanthropist, April 21, 1840.

creation of the abolitionist's movement. His scathing description of Harrison and Van Buren, in their relation to the slavery question, portrayed them with more similarities than differences. Both candidates had pledged, (one outrightly, one by innuendo,) to veto any attempt by Congress to outlaw slavery in the nation's capital. Harrison had also gone so far as to offer the opinion that Congress did not have the right to abolish the business of slavery. Each candidate's running-mate was a "de facto mocker at principles of the Declaration of Independence...." stated Birney, since they were both slaveholders.[126]

Birney believed the majority of abolitionists would not support Van Buren; yet many Whig antislavery men would cast their ballot for Harrison. These Whigs, although abhorrent of Harrison's proslavery leanings, would vote for him because they believed there were "other interests of the country of primer importance than the immediate abolition of slavery...." The "other interests" the antislavery Whigs were so concerned with were related to the "pecuniary, commercial, agricultural and manufacutring condition" of the nation. Admittedly, these were important

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[126]J.G. Birney to Myron Holley, Joshua Leavitt, and Elizur Wright, Jr., May 11, 1840, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., I, pp. 563-565. Harrison's running-mate was John Tyler, a Virginia slaveholder. The Democratic incumbent was Richard M. Johnson, a Kentuckian.

government interests, Birney declared, yet they are not the "highest concerns of a government." What then were the highest concerns of a government? Birney answered this question and thereby presented his philosophy of government as one based on natural rights.

> The security of life - of liberty - of civil and religious privileges - of the rights of conscience - of the right to use our own happiness - of free locomotion, - all these, together with the defense of the barriers and outposts thrown around them by the laws, constitute the highest concerns of a government.[127]

Birney further charged that these natural rights of all men "for the last six years," had been successively invaded, the destructive force being aided by the administrative branch of the government until "the feeling of security for any of them has well nigh expired." Mail censorship, plunder of the Charleston Post Office, strangulation of free speech and debate in the halls of Congress, and the denial of the constitutional rights of petition had been approved by the administration. The new candidate wondered how abolitionists could argue over matters such as the currency or the banking system while "outrages on constitutional and essential rights" were

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[127] Ibid., p. 566.

performed before their eyes. The North was clearly a "conquered province," Birney asserted, and the country's government, in truth, had been "in the hands of the slave power" since the Missouri Compromise.[128]

Birney agreed that Van Buren must be defeated, but in his opinion, Harrison would be equally subservient to the slave power. On the disposition of the country Birney had some final words:

> The conclusion of the whole matter is, that as a people, we are trying an experiment as unphilosophical in theory as it has been, and ever will be, found impossible in practice: to make a harmonious whole out of parts that are, in principle and essence, discordant. It is in vain to think of a sincere union between the North and the South, if the first remain true to her republican principles and habits, and the latter persist in her slave-holding despotism. They are incapable from their natures, of being made <u>one</u>. [129]

What then must the North do to extricate itself from subjectivity to the South? Birney advised that the North required "a great deal more of agitation" to awaken her to a complete understanding of her dangerous position, and "to the necessity, <u>if she would save her own liberty</u>," of either breaking her relationship with

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[128]<u>Ibid</u>., pp. 566-567.

[129]<u>Ibid</u>., pp. 570-571.

the South, or of continuously acting on the South for emancipation.[130]

Birney believed that those abolitionists who voted for Harrison, should he be elected, would "admit they were mistaken by "the first year of his administration...." In his closing lines, Birney consented to be the abolitionist presidential candidate because he was satisfied that the independent nominations plan was "the most effectual for the rescue of the country from the domination of the Slave Power, and for the emancipation of the slaves...."[131]

Birney had decided to accept the Albany nomination long before his May 11, letter for on April 4, 1840, he wrote a letter to Thomas Earle entreating the Philadelphia Democrat to accept the vice-presidential nomination offered him by the Albany Convention. Birney feared that the antislavery enterprise would be "'at an end'" should the independent movement completely fail.[132]

Earle's acceptance letter was not composed until May 30, 1840. He had waited until a convention of "friends of the Albany nominations" had been convened in New York City during the second week in May. Not sufficiently sure

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[130] Ibid., p. 571.

[131] Ibid., p. 573.

[132] Edwin B. Bronner, Thomas Earle As A Reformer (Philadelphia: International Printing Company, 1948), pp. 55-56.

of the programs and policies of the Albany meeting, Earle postponed his acceptance of the nomination until the more nationally representative New York City meeting had deliberated. He then agreed to his candidacy because the meeting had "'unanimously resolved in substance that it would sustain the equal, civil, and political rights of all men, without distinction of wealth, birth, learning or complexion,'" and because it would "'oppose the granting by law of partial or exclusive privileges.'"[133]

Earle had been a stalwart in the party of Jefferson and in general had admired the character of Martin Van Buren, but like Birney, he believed the question of slavery was the paramount issue in the political arena. Earle was convinced that to vote for a Whig candidate, in expectation of antislavery legislation, was a wasted vote. The "'organized incompatability'" of the Whig party did not extend itself to the slavery question, as long as the party could defeat the followers of Andrew Jackson without branding themselves with this firey issue. Whigs, once in office, Earle argued, would make little or no effort to repeal the "'unjust and cruel laws.'" There would be little cause for the office-holders, in their

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[133] Ibid., pp. 57-58.

official capacities, to rock the political boat. Seemingly, motivated with religious zeal, Earle called for a program of converting the people, both North and South, away from their present ideas on the slavery issue. To talk of the evils and wrongs of slavery, Earle believed, would continue to fail to arouse the people to the need for action. The people of the nation, he added, already knew of these evils and attempts to remedy these wrongs vanished in the arms of apathy. The Pennsylvanian was determined that political action should be the "'chief ends'" of antislavery "'exhortations to the people at large'" and therefore consented to the Albany nomination.[134]

As mentioned above, Garrison's diatribes against the "April Fool Convention" were well publicized. But differences over the independent nominations were not the only problems confronting the American Anti-Slavery Society and its auxiliaries for the pecuniary difficulties between the parent group and the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society were threatening an irreparable breach between the two. The American Society, in reality, was bankrupt.[135]

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[134] Ibid., pp. 56-57.

[135] Gilbert H. Barnes, The Antislavery Impulse, 1830-1844 (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., Inc., 1933), pp. 164-167.

In their disdain for the parent society Garrison and the old organization in Massachusetts refused to help dissolve some of its more outstanding debts. The Society was forced to liquidate assets; viz: the Emancipator was transferred to the New York State Anti-Slavery Society; books, pamphlets, and other properties were transferred to Lewis Tappan and S.W. Benedict who were to act as trustees, and apply these materials to future debts.[136] All awaited the annual meeting of the American Society.

Leaders of the national society foresaw the problems facing the members at the anniversary meeting in New York City. In January, 1840, Lewis Tappan had communicated to Bailey the thought that if Birney's planned amendment to the American Society's Constitution failed, at the annual convention a separate and "new association might be formidable."[137] Tappan openly advocated a separate society in a letter to James Birney. Tappan wrote, "I am for cutting adrift of the old Society forth with - as a matter of principle - and forming a new Association."[138]

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[136] Ibid., p. 168.

[137] Lewis Tappan to Gamaliel Bailey, January 21, 1840, Lewis Tappan Papers, 1839-1842 (Manuscript: Library of Congress, Washington D.C.).

[138] Lewis Tappan to J.G. Birney, January 23, 1840, Tappan MSS.

In a message to Gerrit Smith, Tappan referred to Garrison as the "Massachusetts madman."[139] A Pennsylvania abolitionist, Samuel D. Hastings, apprised Tappan of Garrison's "mustering his forces and preparing for battle in May," and inquired if the New Yorker would like a large Philadelphia delegation composed of "religious persons" at the annual meeting. Hastings, fearing the numerical superiority of Garrison's legions, asked Tappan if his proposed action would be "of no use."[140]

Prior to the April nominations at Albany, Gerrit Smith had relayed to Wright his fear that Garrison would attempt to force non-resistance on the American Society. He also expressed the hope that the Albany Convention would be successful and not "'local & insignificant'" as Garrison had forecast.[141]

A special meeting, called by the Executive Committee of the American Society, prior to the annual meeting, declared that the parent organization should resume its own control concerning auxiliaries or dissolve the Society. James Birney and Lewis Tappan proposed the recommendation.[142]

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[139] Lewis Tappan to Gerrit Smith, March 13, 1840, Tappan MSS.

[140] S.D. Hastings to Lewis Tappan, March 25, 1840, Tappan MSS.

[141] Gerrit Smith to Elizur Wright, March 5, 1840, Wright MSS.

[142] The Advocate of Freedom, [Brunswick, Maine], May 2, 1840.

Garrison and the Massachusetts Board were firmly convinced that the sectarians, who had formed the new organization in Massachusetts, would now try to upend the parent organization by calling for a settlement of a variety of issues. They expected that members of the national organization would be faced with questions such as, the rights of women and their place in the organization, the duties of the voter, and the endorsement of a third party. If issues, such as these, failed to disrupt the coming anniversary meeting, Garrison wrote, the final act would probably be to lead a secession movement from its strictures.[143]

Leavitt had let his position be known when he wrote in the pages of the Emancipator that

> The true question is, whether the policy of the American Anti-Slavery Society shall be guided by its constitution, in the hands of a committee of its own choice, responsible at its bar, and representing impartially the abolitionists of the whole land - or whether it shall be controlled at pleasure by a local board, elected by a single auxiliary society, and representing a section of the abolitionists of a single state.[144]

Goodell's judgment was equally as lucid as was Leavitt's.

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[143] The Liberator, April 24, 1840.

[144] Ibid., April 10, 1840, citing Emancipator.

The Utica editor was convinced that abolition and non-resistance and no-government could "no more walk together than abolition and colonization." Antislavery, in Goodell's opinion, could not hold with popery; no infallibility doctrines could be tolerated among abolitionist leaders.[145]

Lines were drawn. Armageddon was in sight. Garrisonians chartered steamboats to carry their delegates to New York, and a notice in The Liberator stated that this transportation was available to both white and black passengers.[146] The anti-Garrisonians also prepared for battle. Josiah Brackett and Joseph W. Alden, members of the Massachusetts Abolition Society Executive Committee, informed Elizur Wright that he was appointed by the Committee to attend the convention. His appearance was mandatory for non-resistance and other matters would be added to the abolition cause. A "crisis" was to occur at the meeting for "war had commenced" upon the parent society's Executive Committee and "the Liberator, and its friends" were presently "sounding the tocsin for a general and exterminating onset at the annual meeting...."[147] A similar message went

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[145] Ibid., May 15, 1840, citing The Friend of Man.

[146] Garrison, op. cit., II, p. 346.

[147] Joshia Brackett and J.W. Alden to Elizur Wright, [illegible], 1840, Wright MSS.

out to all of the Massachusetts Abolitionist Society's delegates through the use of a circular.[148]

In the sanctuary of the Fourth Free Church of New York City, the national meeting got underway with Francis Jackson of Massachusetts, one of the Society's vice-presidents, calling the meeting to order in the absence of Arthur Tappan, president of the organization. A vote was taken on the appointment of Miss Abby Kelley of Massachusetts to the Business Committee. Approximately six hundred of the one thousand delegates present voted in her favor, whereupon, Lewis Tappan and others resigned from the committee, and asked all who had voted against Miss Kelley's appointment to meet and consider the formation of a new society. Tappan was far from despondent over the schism for immediately after the meeting he wrote Theodore Weld informing him that

> The old Society newly organized will, they say, publish a newspaper, have a Depository, and go on famously. So much the better. They will reach points we cannot....[149]

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[148]John A. Collins, Right And Wrong Among The Abolitionists of the United States (Glasgow, Scotland: Aird and Russell, 1841), p. 37.

[149]Lewis Tappan to Theodore Weld, May 23, 1840, in Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond (eds.), Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimke Weld and Sarah Grimke, 1822-1844 (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1965), II, p. 835. Hereafter referred to as Weld-Grimke Letters.

It was an "excellent thing to be separated," he rejoiced to Weld, "and if brotherly love prevails all will rejoice at the event." Now, Lewis Tappan wrote, the cause of abolitionism could go on, perhaps "without any organization."[150] When, in 1870, Tappan published a biography of his brother, Arthur, he had not altered his opinion. In reference to the Society split he wrote:

> Like the division of Christians into different denominations, the combined action being an increase of zeal and efficiency, the division of the abolitionists probably called out increased activity and liberality.[151]

In explanation of the Society's break, Tappan asked Weld to consider the following things:

> 1. The split was not solely on account of the claim that women shall vote, speak, be on committees, etc.
> 2. It was not at all because [of] opposition to their being members of the Society.
> 3. But it was chiefly because Garrison and his party...foisted upon the A. Anti S Soc. the woman question, no government question, etc. and the bad spirit shown by the Liberator, etc.[152]

He added that at the time of the inception of the Society, in 1833, and the formation of its Constitution, "all

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[150] Ibid.

[151] Lewis Tappan, The Life of Arthur Tappan (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1870), p. 305.

[152] Lewis Tappan to Theodore Weld, May 26, 1840, in Barnes and Dumond, Weld-Grimke Letters, op. cit., II, p. 836.

concerned" understood that the term "'person'" was to be interpreted as it usually was in the "Benevolent Societies." All had a "right to be members," stated Tappan; yet men were to conduct the business, and Garrison understood this. Tappan affirmed the right of women to form societies of their own, however, men also had that right, and men had formed the American Society. Tappan charged Garrison with introducing the woman question in the Society "to make an experiment upon the public." He added that:

> He [Garrison] had avowed before that there were subjects paramount to the Anti S. cause. And he was using the Society as an instrument to establish these notions. Since he introduced this question the slave has been lost sight of mainly.[153]

A statement concerning the break was issued by the new American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society and signed by Arthur Tappan, the organization's president. The Society's official paper declared that the woman's rights question was neither the only matter which the membership of the two societies differed on, nor was it the chief cause of disagreement, though it appeared first and most prominently. The "lawfulness of human government, and the "fundamental principle" of the propriety and expediency of political

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[153] Ibid.

action were denied by those who favored what they termed women's rights. These differences, plus the packing of the late annual meeting to sustain the "views and measures" of the no-governmenters had caused the breach in the Society, and the establishment of the secessionist American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.[154]

Garrison was elated. \He wrote to his wife, "'Our campaign has just closed, and a severe siege we have had of it, and a glorious triumph we have achieved.'" He continued by explaining how the "triumph" had come about. Garrison informed his wife, "'It was our anti-slavery boat load that saved our Society from falling into the hands of the new-organizers, or, more correctly, disorganizers.'"[155]

William Goodell sided with the "new-organizers" when he stated in The Friend of Man that to "insist on particular usages in any organised body," when some of the members could not conscientiously agree to these measures, and consequently to "anathematize those who secede" was, in his opinion, "the very essence of that sectarian intolerance and bigotry, which it is so much easier for some people to denounce than to discard."[156] However, Theodore Weld could never bring himself to agree with the basis of the new

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[154]The Liberator, June 19, 1840.

[155]Garrison, op. cit., II, p. 355.

[156]The Friend of Man, June 3, 1840.

organization.[157] Gerrit Smith was "heart sick" over abolition family quarrels.[158]

Abolitionists had split over questions regarding the position of women in antislavery societies, the propriety and efficacy of political action, the duty of abolitionists to vote, the definition of immediatism, the nature and purpose of abolitionist societies, constitutional interpretation of the Society's governing document, the need for human government, and the doctrine of non-resistance.[159]

Gradually a group of abolitionists convinced that slavery would be extinguished, not by moral suasion, but by political activism, had gathered together in a loosely-knit organization and called themselves the Liberty party. Most of them left the fold of the American Anti-Slavery Society, hoping to disassociate themselves from Garrisonian philosophy. They hoped their embryonic party could sway public opinion, and emerge a force on the American political scene, yet clung, now as ever, to the morality and righteousness of their purpose.

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[157] Theodore Weld to Lewis Tappan, April, 1842, in Barnes and Dumond, Weld-Grimke Letters, op. cit., II, p. 938.

[158] Gerrit Smith to Theodore Weld, July 11, 1840, in Barnes and Dumond, Weld-Grimke Letters, op. cit., II, p. 849.

[159] See Walter M. Merrill, Against Wind and Tide, A Biography of William Lloyd Garrison (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 153-156.

CHAPTER III

EARLY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LIBERTY PARTY

The third party movement in the whirl of American political strife has been both praised and blamed. Praised for forcing political action by a major party and damned for threatening to overthrow the American custom of the two-party system. William B. Hesseltine, in his study of the third-party movement makes this observation:

> In general, third parties have performed the function of calling attention to serious problems and pointing a way to their solution. They have stimulated - sometimes, by frightening them - the lethargic or timid politicians of the major parties. They have advocated reforms which the older parties have adopted and enacted into law. And sometimes they have trained leaders for the major parties.[1]

The statement could have been the prologue to the drama of the abolitionist party movement, first portrayed in Albany in 1840. Little did the characters of this antislavery cast realize that their action would lead to the destruction of a major political party and the rise of another and stronger one to replace it. Nor could they have foreseen that the final action of their movement would be a war between brothers and a presidential

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[1]William B. Hesseltine, The Rise and Fall of Third Parties (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1957), pp. 9-10.

proclamation of emancipation. An historian's comment that the political movement begun at Albany "proved to be the most important in our history, since the adoption of the Constitution," is not an overstatement.[2]

Cleavages were prominent in the antislavery camp as the election of 1840 approached. William Goodell remarked that while the American Anti-Slavery Society seemed to advocate no political action whatsoever, the new American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, seemingly, was not opposing such action. He called for a more decided stand by the antislavery groups. He castigated abolitionists for contributing more money to the dissemination of "hard cider" publications than to antislavery propaganda; (a reference to the "log cabin-hard cider" campaign of William Henry Harrison,) he also asked: "Will the opposers of independent nominations be faithful to the slave at the polls?"[3]

In reality, the promotion of the new party relied on the actions of local societies and their individual leaders, for no national party organization existed. The new party's platform was basically a matter of individual interpretation. One might look to the nominee for President,

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[3]The Friend of Man, [Utica, New York], July 1, 1840.

his philosophy of natural rights, his character, reputation, and religiosity, and see in his person the party's program.[4] Or, the ideas of Myron Holley, set forth at Albany, might be construed as the principles of the antislavery party. In his Albany declaration, Holley noted that "the universal application of God's principles" of equality and inalienable rights must be applied to the country through the use of an "external instrumentality"; moral suasion must "act itself out."[5] Party dogma, then, existed only in an abhorrence of slavery.

State and county antislavery societies would decide the fate of the new party. Lines were drawn immediately after the "April Fool" nominating convention. Approval of the new organization was expressed in the Fifth Annual Report of the Maine Anti-Slavery Society. "'Abolitionists,'" the April Report admonished, "'have very generally dishonored the cause,'" by casting their votes with "'the utter abandonment of their anti-slavery principles.'"[6] At Utica, the annual meeting of the New York State Society, Alvan Stewart presiding,

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[4]Dwight L. Dumond, (ed.), Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857 (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1966), I, p. xvii. Hereafter referred to as Birney Letters.

[5]The Liberator, [Boston] , April 10, 1840.

[6]The Friend of Man, September 30, 1840.

endorsed the nominations of Birney and Earle. Similar action took place at a Vermont antislavery convention.[7]

Yet, there were bitter pronouncements against independent political action. The Herald of Freedom regarded the Albany nominations as "a farce."[8] When a September, Hamilton, Ohio Convention recommended the Liberty ticket, the members asserted that their resolve favored independent nominations, but was not a pledge for an independent party.[9] The Ohio Free Press was adamantly opposed to the Albany movement. The Ohio paper charged that the Albany backers had disregarded the West's opinion, and that the third party would be "injurious to prosperity, destroy political energies" and retard the "cause of human rights."[10]

Resolutions opposing independent nominations were passed at an anniversary meeting of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society and the "voice of South Eastern Pennsylvania" was said to be "almost unanimously against the third party."[11] The Pittsburgh Christian Witness did

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[7]The Advocate of Freedom, [Brunswick, Maine], July 16, 1840.

[8]The Liberator, April 24, 1840, citing Herald of Freedom.

[9]The Advocate of Freedom, September 24, 1840.

[10]The Liberator, May 1, 1840, citing Ohio Free Press.

[11]The National Anti-Slavery Standard, [New York City], June 11, 1840, citing Pennsylvania Freeman.

not support the third party movement.[12]

Gerrit Smith saw clearly the problems the abolitionists would face in November and after.

> That the South has vastly overrated the abolition of the North is certain. She will see it when the presidential election shall have taught her, that the great body of our professed abolitionists care more about an independent treasury or national bank than about the bodies and souls and all the inalienable rights of the three millions of their enslaved countrymen.[13]

Smith's fears were justified. With the local societies in disagreement, a haphazard if at all existent party management, and their presidential candidate in Europe, the antislavery party polled only 7,069 or one-quarter of 1 per cent of the 2,411,187 votes cast in 1840. Harrison, the Whig, was elected. But a month after the presidential inauguration, John Tyler, a Virginia slaveholder, state's righter, and nominal Whig sat at the chief executive's desk.

In 1841, Elizur Wright made an adept observation when he noted:

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[12]The Liberator, October 2, 1840.

[13]The Friend of Man, October 7, 1840.

> The state of the pro-slavery parties is remarkable. Multitudes of Whigs have had enough of "Tyler too," and some democrats do not like the prospect of having him for a master.[14]

Owing to altered circumstances, Wight favored action on the part of the new party that would aid its position. The time seemed propitious for converting antislavery members of the other parties to the Liberty fold. William Goodell advised the readers of The Friend of Man that the disagreements among abolitionists were "rapidly adjusting themselves." Goodell stated, "Those who mean to vote in conformity with abolition principles are coming together, and will, for the most part act in unison, politically, as well as in other respects."[15]

By 1841 the new party had gained several noteworthy converts. Dr. F.J. LeMoyne, who had declined the Warsaw Convention's vice-presidential nomination, now joined the Liberty ranks. Although he did not wish to enter public office, LeMoyne accepted the Pennsylvania Liberty Party's

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[14]Elizur Wright to Beriah Green, September 25, 1841, Elizur Wright, Jr. Papers, 1839-1841 (Manuscript: Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.).

[15]The Friend of Man, April 6, 1841.

nominations for Governor in 1841, 1843, and 1847.[16] Another new party adherent was Gamaliel Bailey, editor of The Philanthropist.

The most notable convert to the new party's membership, however, was Salmon Portland Chase of Ohio. In theories of public policy Chase was a Democrat, but in 1840, he supported Harrison. Until Harrison's death, the Ohio lawyer opposed the formation of a third political party believing the action premature and fearing public disfavor.[17] Years later, Chase explained his motives in backing Harrison's nomination. In an 1849 letter to Charles Sumner, Chase stated that he supported Harrison because he thought the Indiana General's administration would be less proslavery than President Van Buren's. A Chase biographer postulates the theory that the Ohioan supported the Whig party until 1841 on the possibility that he could "exert a personal influence over Harrison."[18] Following Harrison's death, Chase became convinced that a third party, founded upon the ideas that the Constitution restricted slavery to the South, and that the slaveocratic

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[16]Margaret C. McCulloch, Fearless Advocate Of The Right; The Life of Francis Julius Lemoyne, M.D., 1798-1879 (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1941), p. 139.

[17]J.W. Schuckers, The Life and Public Services of Salmon Portland Chase, United States Senator And Govern or of Ohio; Secretary of the Treasury, and Chief-Justice of the United States (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1874), p. 46.

[18]Albert B. Hart, Salmon Portland Chase (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1899), pp. 88-90.

administration of the general government should be overthrown, was the only mode of resolute and efficacious resistance to the slaveholding tyranny.[19]

Before the 1840 election, the party leaders in New York planned to meet and renominate Birney and Earle as candidates for 1844.[20] Consequently, a National Liberty Convention was held in New York City, May 12 and 13, 1841. An "Address to The Citizens of the United States," prepared by the delegates, warned that never in the history of the nation had the fact been so apparent that no national administration would ever free itself from the control of the slaveocracy unless an administration was elevated to power for "this distinct end," and "supported for this object....[21]

No intelligent group of men, stated the Address, promotes the election of a President, without seeking in his person one of two qualifications: his promotion of slave interests, or his advocacy of the constitutional overthrow of the slave power. The Convention also voiced the opinion that pecuniary questions were of minor import; the North could thrive on free trade or a protective tariff.

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[19]Schuckers, op. cit., pp. 46-47.

[20]Joshua Leavitt to J.G. Birney, October 1, 1840, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, p. 603.

[21]The Friend of Man, May 25, 1841.

free labor might end many policy questions. The main proposition of the Address was, however, that the doctrine of human rights should decide all questions.[22]

A semblance of national party machinery was erected by the National Convention when the delegates appointed a Central Corresponding Committee to meet at Utica. The Convention nominated Birney for President but by-passed Thomas Earle in favor of former Senator Thomas Morris of Ohio. Commenting on this action Earle stated that many thought it "quite material that the North West should be represented" on the antislavery ticket, and that "some were influenced also by a wish to place Thomas Morris in the chair of the Senate, as a mark of national reprobation of the servile policy which thrust him out of his Senate seat."[23]

In a speech delivered at the Convention, William Goodell charged that the slave power controlled the national government. Vestiges of that control appeared in the tariff controversy, (nullification crisis,) the bank issue, the proscription and prohibition of trade, and the taxation of the north for the prosecution of the War of 1812, which was fought under the pretense of protecting the foreign commerce

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Emancipator, [New York], May 20, 1841.

of the North. In actuality, claimed Goodell, the war had been one of self-aggrandizement on the part of the South, and the culminating peace treaty offered the North no redress or security.[24]

Gamaliel Bailey approved of the New York nominations in the columns of The Philanthropist. The Whigs had charged that the abolitionists were plotting for Van Buren when they ran Birney in 1840. Bailey noted that nominations made far in advance of the election, could not be attributed to "a sinister disposition to interfere with one party, for the sake of promoting the interests of another."[25]

The antislavery question had proven to be of great political importance, in Bailey's opinion. Also, the political involvement of the people of the free states in the evils of slavery had demonstrated that "their political power is necessary to relieve them from its injurious influence."[26] However, Bailey disagreed with several points in Goodell's speech. He was especially averse to Goodell's interpretation of the causes of the War of 1812. Bailey's own view was that the war was caused by the aggressions of Great Britain, and not, as Goodell claimed, by the South's "desire to cripple" the free North

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[24]Ibid., May 27, 1841.

[25]The Philanthropist, [Cincinnati], May 26, 1841.

[26]Ibid.

through destruction of her commerce. Bailey also took issue with Goodell's estimation of Henry Clay. Bailey thought Goodell had been unjust to Clay in his speech when the New Yorker claimed Clay would rather have the free be slaves than the slaves be free.[27]

Letters to Bailey from Goodell soon appeared in The Friend of Man. Goodell qualified his assertion about the war causes somewhat, but continued to malign Clay. On the war issue, Goodell stated:

> ...I know of no fact in the history of my country which my own mind more confidently fastens than upon this; that the war of 1812 was waged chiefly, (I do not say wholly,) by the slaveholding South upon the free laboring North.[28]

Goodell criticized Clay vituperatively. In his opinion, "American liberty" need fear no statesman in the Republic so much as it need fear Clay. On Clay's character, Goodell remarked: "I have long regarded him as the most dangerous and profligate man that has ever been elevated to any high station in this country, not even excepting Aaron Burr."[29] Personality conflicts appeared in the party ranks at the

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[27]Ibid., June 16, 1841.

[28]The Friend of Man, July 13, 1841.

[29]Ibid.,July 20, 1841.

outset but disagreements such as these were of minor importance compared to the major dissents which plagued the abolitionist party throughout its history.

In December, 1841, the Liberty party of Ohio convened in Columbus to discuss candidates for their state, and to propose individual ideas. With Samuel Lewis of Cincinnati presiding, the delegates chose Leicester King, a former state senator, as their candidate for Governor. Of the more than two hundred delegates at Columbus, the outstanding personality and leader was Salmon P. Chase. A tactician and organizer, Chase directed the action of the Convention, and played a major role in drafting resolutions, and preparing the address adopted by the assembly.[30] Prior to the Convention, Lewis advised Chase that he should confine his address "as much as possible, to matters connected with the one topic," since Whig and Democratic antislavery men could not agree on issues other than slavery.[31]

The Columbus group avowed definite principles, and promulgated their ideas in resolutions. While acceding to the rights of the individual states to legislate within their boundaries on the slavery issue, the Columbus

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[30]Schuckers, op. cit., p. 47.

[31]Samuel Lewis to S.P. Chase, December 23, 1841, Samuel P. Chase Papers, Twenty-one Letters from Samuel Lewis to Salmon P. Chase, 1841-1854 (Manuscript: Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.).

delegates emphatically asserted the constitutional right of the federal government to deal with slavery in the District of Columbia, Florida, and on the high seas. The conventioneers also insisted that:

> ...it is the duty of the Government more fully to protect the interests, and to enlarge the market for the products of free labor, (now everywhere depressed in consequence of the dereliction of this duty on the party of Government,) by appropriate domestic legislation and foreign negotiation.[32]

They affirmed the freedom of the press, and the rights of petition and jury trial, and advocated currency reformation, universal education, and frugal dispursement of public funds. Organization of the party on the local level was recommended. The final act of the Ohio Convention was to issue a call for nationwide action. It came in the form of a plea for a "National Convention of the Friends of Constitutional Liberty" to meet at Cleveland, Pittsburgh, or another acceptable site. The proposed convention might fill "any vacancy" which might occur from the presidential and vice-presidential nominations made at the New York Convention the prior May.[33] James Birney had not publicly accepted the National Convention's nomination. His accept-

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[32]The Philanthropist, January 5, 1842.

[33]Ibid.

ance was to arrive formally in a letter composed January 10, 1842, at his new home in Lower Saginaw, Michigan.

In a letter to Birney, Chase explained the Ohio Convention's call for a general party convention. Chase wrote that Thomas Morris had not been consulted about his nomination at New York. Chase was sure that Birney shared Morris's sentiments when the former Senator stated that he would gladly decline the nomination if a stronger candidate could be drafted. Possible nominees mentioned were Governor Seward of New York and former President Adams.[34]

Birney's reply to Chase was polite yet caustic. How frustrated he must have felt, for this was the second time his nomination had been contested by his friends! The recent nominee humbly acknowledged that he would step down in favor of a candidate able to garner more votes than himself. After labeling the Columbus gathering an "interesting occasion," Birney declared that, to his mind, no antislavery convention had ever before considered opposition to slavery "so much as a matter of money policy - so little as a matter of religious duty." He opposed the possible nomination of anyone other than an avowed abolitionist.

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[34]S.P. Chase to J.G. Birney, January 21, 1842, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, pp. 661-662.

Indignantly, Birney wrote,

> It seems strange to me that any abolitionist conversant with our cause could have thought, at this stage of it, of going out of our ranks for candidates for any office. Out of our ranks all public men are of the Whig or Democratic party. How can they be abolitionists? This was tried at the beginning of the political movement of the abolitionists, and always failed, bringing with it great injury.[35]

While he admired Governor Seward, Birney thought that the New Yorker was "an abolitionist in name" and until he was also one in feeling, his nomination would be a "gross disparagement of our cause...." Vehemently opposed to Adams's possible candidacy, Birney considered the former President to be opposed to "almost everything that is peculiar to abolitionists." Adams's presidential record, his opposition to abolition in the District of Columbia, and Florida, and his general animosity toward immediatism could not be outweighed by his exempliary actions during the petition struggle. In closing, Birney hinted at his fears concerning the actions of Chase and company.

> Nothing but the earnest regard that I cherish for the interests of the Anti Slavery cause - which your letter leads me to fear is in some danger from its friends - would persuade me to say what I have of Mr. Adams....[36]

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[35]J.G. Birney to S.P. Chase, February 2, 1842, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, pp. 670-671.

[36]Ibid., pp. 671-672.

Joshua Leavitt and Alvan Stewart cautioned Birney not to withdraw his candidacy. Insulted that the Ohio Convention seemed to forget the existence of the National Executive Committee of the Liberty party, (which he chaired,) Stewart denied the Columbus group's assertions that the May, New York meeting had not fully represented abolitionist opinion, and had failed to establish the third party. Stewart refused the Ohioan's request for another national convention. He was sure New England, New York, and Michigan abolitionists approved of Birney's candidacy, and added that Ohio, in his opinion, had been "well represented," (there were three Ohio delegates,) when the New York nominations had been made, and plans for an 1843 convention resulted. Stewart did not feel that there was a plot or hostility toward Birney in Ohio, but attributed actions of the Western leaders to "a kind of vagueness of purpose...."[37] Leavitt had talked with Samuel Lewis and thought he had "set him right" so that he would not favor "some of the over-wise fancies of Chase and Bailey...."[38]

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[36]Alvan Stewart to J.G. Birney, April 4, 1842, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, pp. 689-690.

[37]Joshua Leavitt to J.G. Birney, June 19, 1842, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, p. 699.

These "fancies" of Chase and Bailey showed up in the columns of The Philanthropist, and in Chase's correspondence. Soon after the Columbus meeting, Bailey began publishing lengthy editorials pertaining to the programs and principles of the new party. In January, 1842, Bailey warned that the Liberty party and the anti-slavery societies should remain independent of each other because of their diverse aims. He thought that political action should aim at the denationalization of slavery, and the protection of free labor. The purpose of organized abolitionism was of a moral quality, viz: "REMOVAL OF SLAVERY UNDER STATE AUTHORITY." Bailey advised abolitionists to leave programs of moral suasion, (conversion of the Southern slaveholder, etc.,) to the societies, and, while acting in a political capacity, to concern themselves only with influencing the national government's policy toward slavery.[38]

In a later editorial, Bailey stated that an "abolition party" had never existed in Ohio. He reiterated sentiments he had espoused in an earlier Philanthropist article, remarking that Eastern Liberty men had not made an explicit distinction between moral action of the societies and abolitionist political action. Bailey

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[38]The Philanthropist, January 12, 1842.

laimed an important difference existed and explained hy so much emphasis should be attached to this distinction.

> The object of our societies is, the extinction of slavery in the United States. No legitimate objection can be urged against them, so long as they pursue this great object by moral means, technically so called. But their transformation into political caucuses or societies, still maintaining the same object, would, to say the least, give them an alarming aspect, and confirm the suspicions of the South, that we are determined to use the political power of the United States, in contravention of the constitution for the accomplishment of our ends.[39]

ailey outlined the various differences between the ocieties and the political party, noting variations in rinciple and practice. He then posed a question: "What hen is the legitimate object of political anti-slavery ction?" That object was a "complex" yet "always a onstitutional one."

> It is to disenthral the laws, institutions and politics of the free states, from subjection to slavery influence; to rid these states of all responsibility in upholding the system of slavery; to give such power to the anti-slavery element in the General Government as shall be sufficient to free the domestic and foreign policy of the United States from slaveholding control, and withdraw all federal support, not absolutely demanded by the constitution, from the system of slavery....[40]

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[39] Ibid., February 16, 1842.

[40] Ibid.

if necessary, he advocated constitutional amendments "to relieve us from participation in the guilt of oppression."[41]

Bailey's comrade, Chase, continued to seek out allies who would agree with his plan to replace Birney as the party's 1844 standard-bearer. He wrote to Lewis Tappan in September, 1842, inquiring if the New Yorker thought Seward might be willing to be drafted as the Liberty presidential candidate, should the party "disengage itself from the narrow ground it has occupied in some of the States," and take an unpregnable, popular, and fair construction of the Constitution as regarded to slavery. Chase was sure that with "Seward as our candidate and constitutional liberty and free labor as our watchword," the Liberty party could carry several states in 1844, and a majority in subsequent elections. He feared that if the party continued with its present candidate, it would become extinct.[42] In early 1843, Chase suggested to Tappan that Judge William Jay might be nominated at the impending Buffalo Convention.

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Joseph G. Rayback, "The Liberty Party Leaders of Ohio: Exponents of Antislavery Coalition," The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly, LVII (1948), p. 171.

Clearly, a movement was afoot in Ohio to broaden the appeal of the new party, and replace the once-defeated Birney with a more experienced antislavery politician who would be a more effectual vote-getter.

However, the Ohio movement did not succeed at the time of its conception. None of the proposed alternates to Birney were willing to allow the proposal of their names. Seward and Adams were noted party politicians; their hesitancy seems understandable. Lewis Tappan evidently sounded out William Jay for in October, 1842, he wrote Tappan stating that since Birney's nomination had been approved, the nomination should stand. He added that he did not wish to offend Birney's backers.[43] The Ohio movement had to wait.

Activity among the Liberty men was not limited to the West. Throughout the North abolitionists spoke out on the issues of party policy. In an article in the Free American, organ of the Massachusetts Abolition Society, Charles T. Torrey considered the subjects of commerce and government. To his mind, the Liberty party's policy need be a simple one: the destruction of the

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[43] William Jay to Lewis Tappan, October 3, 1842, Lewis Tappan Papers, 1839-1842 (Manuscript: Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.).

"commercial dependence of the North upon slavery."[44]

Chief among those Liberty men who saw an intimate correlation between commerce and slavery was Joshua Leavitt. Before the party's foundations had been layed Leavitt decided that politics, commerce, and slavery were unmistakably intertwined.[45] On a tour through Ohio, in 1840, Leavitt espoused views on the political and financial power of the slave states. His speeches were later published in antislavery papers throughout the country, and in pamphlet form under the title the "Financial Power of Slavery."

During his Ohio visit, Leavitt attempted to show the incompatability of free and slave institutions. He based the political power of slavery on the fact that it was a monopoly, and because slaves were declared property, yet slave states were granted representation for their bondsmen, (a reference to the three-fifths clause of the United States Constitution,). Leavitt added that the extent and bearing of slavery's political power "aggravated its injustice" and afforded the South

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[44] Emancipator, November 25, 1841, citing Free American.

[45] Julian P. Bretz, "The Economic Background of the Liberty Party," The American Historical Review, XXXIV (January, 1929), p. 255.

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[44]Emancipator, November 25, 1841, citing Free American.

[45]Julian P. Bretz, "The Economic Background of the Liberty Party," The American Historical Review, XXXIV (January, 1929), p. 255.

1840 and 1841 throughout the wheat-growing districts of New England, New York, and the Northwest. Leavitt journeyed to the nation's capital in order to promote both antislavery and free trade.[49]

An article in Bailey's Philanthropist, printed in January, 1842, indicated the relevancy of Leavitt's arguments. Leavitt's aim, of course, was to attract members to the third party. Since most antislavery Northwesterners were Whigs, and thus protectionists, it was necessary to convince them that the Whig party allied itself against their humanitarian sympathies and economic interests. The Philanthropist essay, entitled, "The North West And The Liberty Party," warned that a larger grain market had to be opened, for already the Northwest was able to produce more than the Atlantic seaboard could "consume or ship abroad for profit." In a bid for the third party support, the article added,

> But no pains will be taken to secure such a market, until the people make up their minds to choose an administration, devoted to the interests of FREEDOM AND FREE LABOR. The people of the Northwest, above all others, ought to give their hearty support to the Liberty Party.[50]

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[49] Ibid., p. 219.

[50] The Philanthropist, January 26, 1842.

Another policy discussion going on within the third party ranks concerned abolitionist's duties toward fugitive slaves. In an 1842 letter to Chase, Birney expressed regret that a "pledge or appearance of a pledge" in the Columbus Address, apparently promised "non interference" with the delivering up of fugitive slaves. "Few things," Birney stated, "have contributed more to keep alive the spirit of abolitionists than the rescuing of slaves," and so-called interference with "the infamous and bloody stipulation of the Constitution." Birney thought the subject would have been better left dormant than presented in such a manner. He communicated his position clearly to Chase when he promised:

> Whatever pledges may be given of non interference, they will be disregarded - at least as long as our body has any life or humanity in it, or any greater fear of God than of man.[51]

A Michigan Liberty Convention that nominated Birney for Governor in 1843, agreed with their candidate's enmity toward the Fugitive Slave Law.

> Michigan is not bound - nor are any of the States made in the North Western Territory bound - by the ordinance of 1787 - and of

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[51]J.G. Birney to S.P. Chase, February 2, 1842, Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, pp. 670-671.

> course not by the Constitution of the United States - to deliver up fugitives from service and labor who may escape from the "new" slave states and be found in the said North Western States.[52]

Since the Michigan Resolution was based on a memorial to the Michigan State Legislature, prepared by Birney, a gradual change in Birney's thought can be noted in the references made to the Constitution. While Birney referred to the article in question as a "bloody stipulation of the Constitution," in his letter to Chase, the Michigan resolve denoted a belief that the founding fathers did not intend that the constitutional clause be interpreted as an aid to slavery. The cogency of this and other abolitionist interpretations of the United States Constitution became more relavent in the later years of the Liberty party's history.

Possibly the most radical resolution ever authorized by a Liberty convention was passed by acclamation at a Peterboro, New York, gathering. The assemblage of four hundred, representing nineteen New York counties, met January 19, 1842, nominated Alvan Stewart for Governor, and

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[52] Emancipator and Free American, [Boston], March 16, 1843, formerly Emancipator, [New York].

passed the following resolution:

> Resolved, That we solemnly and deliberately proclaim to the nation, that no power on earth shall compel us to take up arms against the slaves, should they use violence in asserting their right to freedom.[53]

Gerrit Smith was chiefly responsible for the adoption of the resolution. Earlier, he had presented to the assembly an "Address To The Slaves," in which he recommended that they flee the bondages of slavery. The Peterboro Convention approved Smith's Address.

As the time for the national convention at Buffalo drew near, the Ohioans' plan to supplant Birney's name as their standard-bearer continued. In the spring of 1843, Gamaliel Bailey questioned Birney on his candidacy, and asked the nominee to estimate his qualifications for the nation's highest office. Indignantly, Birney replied that his desire for party harmony, and the "extreme delicacy" of the matter prompted him to excuse himself from "deciding on the comparative eligibility of myself and any other gentlemen in regard to this matter."[54]

Bailey had sounded out Birney on his views of democracy. In an abbreviated dissertation Birney stated

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[53] The Liberator, February 11, 1842, citing New York Tribune.

[54] J.G. Birney to Gamaliel Bailey, April 16, 1843, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, p.732.

his beliefs that American democracy was still an experiment; that there were "excellencies" in other forms of government which the American system lacked, and that the essential of stability was lacking in the American governmental structure owing to the country's subjection to "popular excitements," and the consequent influence of demagogues. Birney also noted his dissatisfaction with universal suffrage, which, in his opinion, impeded the "advance in refinement and true civilization...."[55]

William Birney, James Birney's son and a Cincinnati resident, warned his father of Bailey's esoteric activities in Ohio. Bailey was not worthy of confidence, cautioned the younger Birney: "He plays the ostrich feat of running his head under cover and thinking his whole body concealed." The young Ohioan's knowledge of Bailey's moves was more than hearsay for he informed his father:

> He has made use, to my certain knowledge of words dropped by you in casual conversation of the right of the people to vote, so as to persuade others that you were a monarchist in your political views - and therefore unfit to hold, or be a candidate for, office in a Republic....[56]

After the Bailey-Birney correspondence on democracy and

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[55] Ibid., p. 733.

[56] William Birney to J.G. Birney, April 29, 1843, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, p. 737.

suffrage took place, William Birney was sure Bailey was working against his father. William charged that the elder Birney's reply, admittedly an "imperfect" one, was being used by the Cincinnati editor to further divide the friends of the cause in the Buckeye State. Questions of democracy and suffrage, although never discussed in Liberty papers, and not "intimately connected" with the Liberty cause at present, were now being made a "test question" by late converts and neophytes in democracy. Dejectedly, William foretold of nothing ahead but division and "disturbance, distraction of our ranks, and paralysis of our energies." The Ohio movement so greatly disturbed the young abolitionist that he lamented:

> When I witness these ill-considered movements on the part of the friends of the Slave, I do feel that our hope is not in man or in political action but in the flames of insurrection, or a foreign war.[57]

Friction between the Ohio group and the Birneys continued to the eve of the Buffalo Convention. Writing to Samuel Lewis in July, James Birney recalled the problems encountered by the part in its infancy, and warned that the interjection

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[57]William Birney to J.G. Birney, June 14, 1843, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, pp. 741-742.

of the party nominee's opinions on "speculative" questions would only cause "difficulties from which the most judicious of our party are but now beginning to congratulate themselves on having escaped from."[58]

Less than two weeks prior to the Buffalo meeting, Birney informed Leavitt of his communications with the Ohio leaders. The Liberty candidate had seen a recent call for Judge Jay's nomination for President on the Liberty ticket. Although the article bore a fictitious signature, its appearance in The Philanthropist, and Bailey's silence concerning the article, indicated that it had been directed by the leadership of the Ohio party. If Judge Jay adhered to the Liberty party, and Leavitt discerned his nomination a boon to the cause, Birney was willing to withdraw his name from nomination.[59]

Clearly then, the men at the Buffalo meeting would have to deal with difficult tasks. They would have to decide on candidates, adopt a platform, temper divisiveness within their ranks, and prepare for the campaign of the coming year.

The Buffalo Convention, meeting in the last week

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[58]J.G. Birney to Samuel Lewis, July 13, 1843, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, p. 743.

[59]J.G. Birney to Charles H. Stewart and Joshua Leavitt, August 17, 1843, Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, p. 756.

of August, 1843, indicated that a shift in the party's leadership was imminent. Chase and the Ohio delegation in general, served in leadership capacities throughout the gathering. Leicester King was chosen presiding officer; Samuel Lewis served as a vice-president; and the resolutions were, in the main, the handiwork of Chase.

Approximately one thousand delegates congregated in the New York city. Every free state, with the exception of New Hampshire, sent representatives. Chase's proposal to postpone formally acting upon nominations until the coming year was defeated.[60] The assembly confirmed the nominees of 1841, Birney and Morris.

A Liberty platform was approved, and presented to the populace as an expression of the principles and purposes of the party. A resolution rejected by Chase and the committee on resolutions, was adopted in open convention after its proposer, John Pierpont of Massachusetts, delivered an "eloquent speech" in its defense.[61]

> Resolved, That we hereby give it to be distinctly understood, by this nation and the world, that, as abolitionists, considering that the strength of our cause lies in its righteousness - and our hope for it in our conformity with the LAWS OF GOD, and our respect for the RIGHTS OF MAN, we owe it to

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[60]Schuckers, op. cit., p. 69.

[61]Ibid., p. 70.

> the Sovereign Ruler of the Universe, as a proof of our allegiance to Him, in all our civil relations and offices, whether as private citizens, or as public functionaries sworn to support the Constitution of the United States, to regard and to treat the third clause of the second section of the fourth article of that instrument, whenever applied to the case of a fugitive slave, as utterly null and void, and consequently as forming no part of the Constitution of the United States, whenever we are called upon, or sworn to support it. [62]

Based on the natural rights philosophy, the resolve stated that the Constitution was an agreement between the people, (as opposed to the states,) of the United States. Universal moral law and the common law principle that any act "derogatory to natural law, is vitiated and annulled by its inherent immorality" took precedent over human law. Many party members reasoned that the constitutional provision for the return of fugitive slaves infringed on the slave's natural right to liberty and thus was "absolutely void."[63] Pierpont's controversial resolve was in line with the Birney memorial to the Michigan Legislature, but contradicted Chase's Columbus Address of 1841 which promised protection to slavery in the states. Many of the planks of the Buffalo platform, however, reflected the principle philosophy of the Cincinnatian.

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[62] Emancipator and Free American, September 14, 1843.

[63] Ibid.

Several resolutions concerning free labor bore Chase's mark. The sixteenth resolve stated:

> ...That the peculiar patronage and support hitherto extended to slavery and slaveholding, by the General Government ought to be immediately withdrawn, and the example and influence of national authority ought to be arrayed on the side of Liberty and free labor.[64]

Another resolve opposed the policy of the federal government whereby slave labor products were promoted throughout the world, while the interests of free labor were neglected. Reminiscent of Chase's Columbus Address, the delegates resolved that owing to their belief that "intelligence, religion and morality," were indispensable supports of good government, they favored "general education," and also declared

> ...That good government itself is necessary to the welfare of society, and we are therefore in favor of rigid public economy, and strict adherence to the principles of justice in every department of its administration.[65]

Other resolutions dealt with the general nature of the Liberty party. They noted that the party had not been organized for "any temporary purpose," nor was it organized merely "for the overthrow of Slavery," but also to "carry

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

out the principles of Equal Rights, into all their practical consequences and applications." The party was neither a sectional nor a new party, but a national party, a resurrection of the "party of 1776...." The group declared that the Northwest Territory was free soil, that slavery was strictly a local institution, and that the general government had "no power to establish or continue slavery anywhere...."[66]

One leading man, Gerrit Smith, was unable to attend, and instead sent a letter to the Convention. Smith asserted that the "one idea" of abolition was not and never had been the sole concern of the party, although it was the prime interest. The purpose of the party was to unite abolitionists into a coherent association.[67]

As the Convention ended, and the tent that housed the meetings, provided by Oberlin Collegiate Institute, came down, the delegates could claim accomplishment. They had named their candidates, framed a platform, and smoothed over divisiveness. But the great trial was yet to come: the 1844 election.

Between the election years 1840 and 1844, the

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[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

Liberty party stressed organization. A National Liberty Committee was formed, and many influential antislavery men joined the new party. Yet new members, as well as the older ones, professed the party's ideology in an individualistic manner. Diversity within the group led to animosities, but the approaching election of 1844 caused the loosely-knit group to cover up, if not inter, their differences of opinion.

CHAPTER IV

A TRIO OF CANDIDATES: THE ELECTION OF 1844

The 1844 national election proved a turning point for the Liberty party. The quadrennial referendum tested abolitionist voting strength, and indicated how successful the abolitionists had been in swaying public opinion. Also, the campaign showed how far the other parties were willing to go in destroying the political effectiveness of abolitionists.

During the fall of 1843, the Liberty party's membership was enhanced by the addition of known abolitionists to its ranks. The recipient of a New York State Convention's nomination for Governor, Judge William Jay, wrote to Gerrit Smith in 1843, and said of the party: "'May God direct its measures for the protection of our own rights and for the ultimate liberation of the slave.'"[1] In a letter to John Scoble, an English abolitionist, Lewis Tappan, who strongly opposed the party at its inception, stated: "'Hitherto, as you know, I have refrained from any active efforts with those who have been zealous in promoting the Anti-Slavery Liberty Party, but I deem it

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[1]Bayard Tuckerman, William Jay And The Constitutional Movement For The Abolition Of Slavery (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1893), p. 119.

my duty now to aid in every way in which I can consistently.'"[2] While the new party adherents might indicate greater unity among Liberty men, factionalism, the party quietus, continued.

After the Buffalo Convention, Gamaliel Bailey denied his support to the party ticket. Now he objected to Morris rather than Birney. S.P. Chase's "political acumen" seems to have spared the party the trial of an open breach. Bailey had threatened to publicly accuse Morris of "youthful indiscretions" and demand his renunciation of the vice-presidential nomination. However, Chase convinced Bailey that peace had to be maintained within the party ranks.[3]

The Buffalo Convention exhorted Liberty men throughout the country "to organize for efficient action in their respective States, counties, cities, towns, and districts...." Also, the Convention recommended that the party "make efforts to secure the control of town power...."[4] Resolutions

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[2]Annie H. Abel and Frank J. Klingberg (eds.), A Side-Light On Anglo-American Relations, 1839-1858, Furnished By The Correspondence of Lewis Tappan And Others With The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (Lancaster, Pennsylvania: The Association For The Study of Negro Life And History, Inc., 1927), p. 148.

[3]Betty L. Fladeland, James Gillespie Birney: Slaveholder to Abolitionist (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1955), p. 240.

[4]Emancipator and Free American, September 14, 1843.

such as these were acted upon with great vigor by Liberty men in many of the Northern states.

In Madison County, New York, Gerrit Smith and his allies, though unsuccessful in their efforts, demonstrated impressive zeal and ability, for the county Liberty vote was 1,785, or 1,205 more votes than the party garnered the preceding year.[5] While none of the Liberty candidates were elected to a major office, notable vote increases occurred in Maine, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, and Michigan. Most noteworthy were the returns from Massachusetts and New York. The Massachusetts increase over 1842 was more than 2,000, and New York added over 9,000 votes to her 1842 total. The national Liberty vote of 1843 was upward of 20,000 over 1842, and nine times that of 1840.[6]

One method of inducing members to the party was the use of propaganda in antislavery newspapers. An article entitled, "Reasons for Voting The Liberty Ticket" was published in various papers, and its tenets urged on voters from Maine to Ohio. The exposition of antislavery grievances included five major headings. First, the

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[5]Ralph V. Harlow, Gerrit Smith, Philanthropist and Reformer (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1939), p. 169.

[6]Niles' National Register, [Baltimore, Maryland], October 4, 1843.

article asserted that the liberties of the country were in danger. Imminent peril to the country's freedom was evidenced by the overthrow of the right of petition, nullification of habeas corpus, seizure of the right of trial by jury, abridgement of the right of intercourse from state to state, and the even greater interference with liberty in the slave states than in the free. Second, voters were warned that the prosperity of the nation was being impaired and endangered by the usurpations of the "Slave-Holding Oligarchy." Since a quarter of a million slaveholders dominated the policy of the federal government, and, consequently, abused negotiations and legislation for their selfish purposes, freemen of the North were admonished to vote for the party that demanded world markets for the products of free labor. The North unjustly suffered enormous taxation for the maintenance of slavery, evidenced by the Florida War, the use of troops in the South for the purpose of safeguarding slaves, expensive operations for the negotiation of markets for slave products, and the high duties levied on sugar. Next, the item asserted that the slaveholders held an unfair proportion of political power by virtue of the three-fifths rule.[7]

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[7]The Philanthropist, [Cincinnati], October 4, 1843.

Voters were prompted to cast their ballots for Liberty men because slavery despised and sneered at free labor and free laborers. Southern political leaders, Whigs and Democrats, were quoted, and their utterances labeled as degrading to free labor. The Liberty party, stated the commentary, was opposed to the "system" which allowed the pronouncements of a John C. Calhoun or a George McDuffie. The article concluded that the citizens of the free states were involved in the guilt and dishonor of supporting the peculiar institution since they allowed the unconstitutional existence of slavery in Florida, and the District of Columbia, and took no measures against the coastwise slave trade. The North could absolve itself of its sins by voting the Liberty ticket.[8]

Liberty men employed other modes of action. Tracts were published and distributed; Liberty associations were formed; and conventions met, adopted resolutions, and heard addresses. One notable Liberty discourse, the "Address of the Liberty Party of Pennsylvania To The People Of The States," was printed under the auspices of the Convention of Delegates of the Liberty Party of the Eastern Section of Pennsylvania, held at Philadelphia,

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[8] Ibid.

February 22, 1844. The composer of the Address, Charles Dexter Cleveland, paralleled the principles of the party with those of the Declaration of Independence, the Federal Constitution, the Northwest Ordinance, and the founding fathers. The object of the Liberty party was neither to excite hatred toward the South, nor to promote "hostile strife" between the free and slave states. Rather, Cleveland stated, the party wished to show the freemen of the North that the slave states were inferior to their Northern neighbors in population, morals, mental attainments, in natural resources, and in everything "that constitutes the wealth, the honor,...the true greatness of a nation...." In essence, the Liberty party's program endeavored to awaken the people of the North to their own legitimate interests. Contrary to assertions of the enemies of the party, Cleveland avowed that the organization claimed no right or power to alter state laws. But, he reminded enemies and friends alike that "slavery is the mere creature of local or statute law, and cannot exist out of the region where such law has force." Cleveland then suggested the "GREAT" object of the Liberty party as being the establishment of justice, and the guarantee of liberty's blessings. Specifically, the oft stated object of the party was the "ABSOLUTE AND UNQUALIFIED DIVORCE

OF THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT FROM ALL CONNECTION WITH SLAVERY...."[9]

The Pennsylvanian listed the specific changes the party would enact or have enacted through constitutional means. Political action constituted "acting in a manner appropriate to those objects which we wish to secure through the agency of the different departments of Government." However, moral suasion was not to be underrated, was ever in use, and was "the great power." Yet moral suasion needed a lever in order to be effectual; political action was this lever. Why? Cleveland asserted, plainly, because slavery was the creature of political action, thus, how else than by political action could it be abolished? The laws that sustained slavery were man-made, declared Cleveland, and a violation of God's laws. Only men could repeal their self-made laws. The separate political organization was set up because it was the only "effectual mode" of action for abolitionists. No results emanated from appeals to both political parties. The question system failed. In the coming election, therefore, citizens were urged to vote for the candidate of the party that was organized out of a

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[9]Salmon Portland Chase and Charles Dexter Cleveland, Anti-Slavery Addresses of 1844 and 1845 (Philadelphia: J.A. Bancroft and Company, 1867), pp. 43-46.

sense of what was due to themselves, and "to the best" of the country. Cleveland continued the Philadelphia Address with outlines of the character and principles of each of the three presidential candidates of 1844.[10]

Almost a year after the Liberty men met in Buffalo, the Whigs and Democrats met May 1, and May 7, respectively, in Baltimore, Maryland. The Whigs unanimously nominated Henry Clay for President. Owing to Van Buren's failure to capture a two-thirds majority in the Democratic Convention, James Knox Polk, former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, and one-term Governor of Tennessee, became the "dark horse" presidential candidate of the Democratic party.

Although the tariff, national bank, and Oregon boundary dispute were relevant issues in the campaign, the overriding issue was the question of Texas annexation. Polk relied on the expansionist program of Robert J. Walker of Mississippi. The Tennessean, supported by former President Andrew Jackson, based his campaign on the "reannexation of Texas and reoccupation of Oregon." Clay's position on annexation proved ambiguous.

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[10] Ibid., pp. 48-52.

Clay's views on Texas annexation were published in the National Intelligencer in 1843, and came to be called the "Raleigh Letter." In his correspondence, the Kentuckian proclaimed that the annexation of Texas, sans Mexican approval, would lead to a United States-Mexican War, and declared that the public had not demanded such a policy. After winning the Whig nomination, however, Clay's stand on the Texas issue became vague. In July, 1844, public correspondence between Clay and Stephen J. Miller of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, (known as the "Alabama Letters",) the Whig nominee asserted that he did not oppose annexation, but feared abolitionist opinion. Also, Clay stated that without war, with fair terms, and with the consent of the Union, he would be glad to see annexation, and thought the slavery question irrelevant to the annexation issue.[11] Of the three candidates, only Birney openly opposed the annexation of Texas without equivocation. He thought the act was unconstitutional, and would incite desires for additional Mexican land.[12]

During the election year, the Liberty candidate was questioned on his views on the tariff, national bank,

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[11]Louis Filler, The Crusade Against Slavery, 1830-1860, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), pp. 176-177.

[12]Fladeland, op. cit., p. 236.

distribution of public lands, and congressional power over slavery. Pennsylvania Liberty men, living in a protectionist region, were most interested in Birney's views on the tariff issue. Russell Errett, Chairman of the Western Pennsylvania Liberty Committee, inquired of Birney's position on the tariff, in a July letter. Convinced that neither Clay nor Polk were tariff men, Errett, a proponent of one-ideaism, told Birney that the Liberty men of Western Pennsylvania were "pestered to death" with the tariff issue. While the protectionists were not satisfied with Clay, they had no means of judging how "safe" it would be to vote for Birney.[13] The Liberty candidate replied that he favored a tariff for revenue "to meet the expenditures of the government," and was opposed to a protectionist policy. Assured that many Liberty men would disagree with his tariff views, Birney had not publicly espoused them for fear that the friends of the "paramount object," the extinction of the slave power, would be diverted from the one idea.[14]

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[13]Russell Errett to J.G. Birney, July 13, 1844, in Dwight L. Dumond (ed.), Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857 (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1966), II, p. 820. Hereafter referred to as Birney Letters.

[14]J.G. Birney to Russell Errett, August 5, 1844, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, pp. 829-831.

Birney did not favor the scheme of proportionally alloting to the states the proceeds of the public lands. He advocated depositing the receipts in the United States Treasury. Birney thought that Congress had the constitutional power to establish a national bank. As long as slavery existed, however, he did not favor the establishment of such an institution. On congressional power over slavery Birney stated: "My mind strongly inclines to the opinion, that, if Congress can rightly abolish slavery in time of war, it may also abolish it in times of peace." Since a "vicious and dangerous state of things existing in the community" might become "as destructive of the government" in peace-time as well as during a war, Birney reasoned that congressional power over slavery during war-time could be equally valid while peace existed. The nominee's belief in the principles of liberty promulgated in the Declaration of Independence, and incorporated in the Constitution, led him to the conclusion that the citizens of the United States were "under a pledge" to the world and each other to abolish slavery.[15] The Constitution's references

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[15] J.G. Birney to Messrs. Lucian C. Jones, Salmon N. Hart, Robert M. Beebe, August 15, 1844, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, pp. 833-834.

to persons and its avoidance of the word slaves, along with the "due process clause" of the Fifth Amendment, clarified his present view that slavery was a product of municipal law. Also, Congress could constitutionally abolish the domestic slave trade by utilizing its power to regulate interstate commerce.[16]

How would a Liberty party national administration go about abolishing slavery? Birney stated that a simple, effectual means would be employed: limitation of governmental appointments to non-slaveholders. This action, Birney claimed, would be just, reasonable, and propitious because those whose lives exemplified "open contempt" of the fundamental principles of the government should be excluded from its administration.[17]

Although Birney talked of the possible powerful position of the Liberty party, in early 1844, most abolitionists believed Clay would be the next President. H.B. Stanton wrote Chase in February, 1844, and prophesied: "Clay's prospects begin to brighten, & he will be elected, unless 'the democracy' can harmonize."[18] An Ohio Liberty

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[16] Ibid., p. 835.

[17] Ibid.

[18] H.B. Stanton to S.P. Chase, February 6, 1844, in S.H. Dodson (compiler), "Diary and Correspondence of Salmon P. Chase," (Washington, D.C.: Annual Report of the American Historical Association For The Year 1902, 1903), II, p. 464.

man informed Birney that fence-sitters in his area would probably vote for Clay who "with all his undivested knowledge of national policy arises like a meteor before the aspiring eye...."[19] Lewis Tappan, writing to John Scoble, stated that the pro-annexation position of Polk, who, said Tappan, would receive the votes of many opposed to annexation but wed to party. Of Clay, Tappan noted that while the Whig was a slaveholder, he professed to be "'opposed to annexation under certain circumstances...'" However, Tappan had no doubt that the sponsor of the Missouri Compromise would readily acquiesce in the annexation of Texas if the measure should "'prove popular with his party.'" Though he thought abolitionists in general would vote for Birney, Tappan informed Scoble that Clay would probably be elected and inducted into office on March 4. He added: "'The abolitionists generally prefer him to Mr. Polk, not on account of his general character, but because he is more committed against the annexation of Texas."[20] Clay's Alabama Letters, however, repulsed the abolitionist camp.

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[19]Richard H. Brackin to J.G. Birney, July 31, 1844, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, p. 828.

[20]Abel and Klingberg, op. cit., pp. 183-184.

In September, The Emancipator published a "Creed on Annexation." The item contended that the Liberty vote could impede annexation, and warned that there was a better chance of annexation with Clay than with Polk since by indirection and compromise Clay had silenced Northern opposition to the act.[21] Clay's bid for Southern support left man abolitionists in doubt concerning his position.

The 1844 campaign was a mudslinging affair. A variety of charges were leveled at Birney. He was accused of esoteric Catholicism, and his motives for freeing his slaves while an Alabama resident were attacked. A young newspaperman in Birney's hometown, Danville, Kentucky, revived an accusation that Birney had sold his slaves for profit and then become an abolitionist. The Liberty candidate was also charged with defrauding his creditors, and his Alabama law partner, in the process of emancipating his slaves. In a move for support from Anglophobes, a Southern representative labeled Birney a candidate of British abolitionist organizations.[22]

Since Clay's 1839 Senate speech, abolitionists had

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[21]The Emancipator and Weekly Chronicle, [Boston], September 4, 1844. Formerly The Emancipator and Free American.

[22]Fladeland, op. cit., pp. 238-239.

spoken of him in contemptuous terms. The election and Clay's questionable Texas policy increased abolitionist propaganda against the Kentuckian. Birney attacked him in a pamphlet. Throughout the campaign, Liberty men referred to Clay as a gambler, a man-stealer, a duelist, and a "Sabbath breaker."[23]

The most damning charges, however, were against Birney and appeared a month before the election. On October 10, 1844, a New York Tribune article charged Birney with complicity with the Democratic party.

> We are not surprised to learn that the Loco-Focos of Saginaw county have nominated, with his assent, JAMES G. BIRNEY, ESQ. the Abolition candidate for the President, as the Loco-Foco candidate for Representative in the State Legislature.[24]

The article continued in its diatribe against the Liberty candidate. "Loco-focos" had been just in their offering, claimed the Tribune, since no man had labored "so hard or effectively" as Birney had "to secure the electoral vote of

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[23]R.H. Brackin to J.G. Birney, July 31, 1844, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, p. 828.

[24]The New York Daily Tribune, October 10, 1844. Locofocosim has been described as a 'radical' movement of the middle thirties, centered in New York City, led by the left wing of the Jacksonian party, advocating hard-money, anti-monopoly, and anti-national bank. The Tribune used the term in a general way, probably considering Loco-focos and Democrats one and the same.

Michigan to Mr. Polk." Also, Birney's current Eastern journey, cloaked under the pretext of visiting one of his children, was "undertaken at the instance of leading Loco Focos as well as Abolitionists of New York." Although the Tribune had been convinced of Birney's sympathetic attitude toward Locofocoism before the Saginaw nomination, now others would be awakened to it. The New York paper made a prediction:

> Whig Abolitionists will not,...consent to be made Mr. Birney's catspaws in such a game for the exclusive benefit of the Loco Foco party, when they come to see this conclusive proof of his position. They will not follow their presidential candidate into the camp of Loco-Focoism.[25]

Actually, Birney had been proposed as a nominee for the Michigan State Legislature the preceding year, by a convention of Whigs and Democrats. Another man had been nominated when Birney's declination was assured. Because of his education, experience, and initiative, Birney had been considered a leader in the community since his arrival in Michigan. The Liberty candidate was consulted about his possible candidacy for local office before he departed on his Eastern tour. Should he receive the nomination,

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[25] Ibid.

Birney thought he should be the representative of all the people rather than of a single party. Ready to use any means to discredit Birney, Whig state and national leaders seized on the fact that he was nominated by a Democratic convention.[26] Clay, once the accused perpetrator of a "corrupt bargain", now was proclaimed the victim of one.

On the day the Tribune article appeared, Birney replied to the editor, disclaiming the paper's charges. After explaining his non-partisanship in Michigan's local political affairs, the candidate stated that the Loco-Foco label would not have been applied to him "had not the cue been given by the wire-workers of the Whig party - especially by the originator of the coalition story, the Detroit Advertiser...." The Advertiser, stated Birney, had "spared neither fact nor fiction to win over the Liberty Party in Michigan to the support of the Whigs, by weakening their confidence" in him.[27] In a postscript to the Tribune letter, the nominee added that respecting his Michigan nomination, the only direct information he had received was from a Whig of Saginaw, whose language proved party loyalties

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[26]Fladeland, op. cit., pp. 241-242.

[27]J.G. Birney to Editor of Tribune, October 10, 1844, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., pp. 852-853.

had not been a factor in the nomination. The Michigan Whig told Birney: "'I think you may make up your mind to spend this winter in Detroit, for this seems to be the wish of a good number of both parties.'"[28]

Several days later, in a move to alleviate party dissension, Birney published a letter to the Liberty party. He assured his colleagues that no pledges or partyism were involved in the Michigan nomination, And he cautioned the Liberty men that the Whigs could "see the influence of their outcry" and were consequently redoubling it. If Liberty men yielded to the clamor, Birney warned that they would be "confounded and routed...."[29] If Liberty men doubted the political loyalties of their presidential nominee after the Saginaw nomination, their doubts were bolstered by an article in the November 2 edition of the New York Tribune.

In an item headed 'James G. Birney Unmasked!' the Tribune reported its acquisition of an Extra of the Genessee Country Democrat, a Michigan newspaper. The Democrat Extra contained an affidavit, supposedly bearing the signature of Jerome B. Garland of Michigan.

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[28] Ibid., p. 853.

[29] J.G. Birney to Liberty party, October 15, 1844, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, p. 857.

Garland's correspondence contained a letter from Birney which stated that the candidate was traveling to the East to defeat Clay's election and declaring himself a "Jeffersonian Democrat." The Extra quoted Birney as stating:

> The Democracy of the country must be well satisfied that I am rendering them more effectual service by advocating Abolition principles, than if I were OPENLY A DEMOCRAT.[30]

The letter came to be known as the Garland forgery.

The charges leveled at Birney were never proven, however, the Genessee Extra letter along with the Saginaw nomination effected the outcome of the election in at least one state. The Garland forgery was distributed throughout the North. The Whig Central Committee circulated it over the Western Reserve of Ohio, "hoping to induce wavering Whigs to remain loyal to their party."[31] A student of Ohio politics estimates that the "loss of a thousand votes by the Liberty Party, between the state election in October, and the national election" can be attributed to the forgery.[32]

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[30]The New York Daily Tribune, November 2, 1844.

[31]Edgar A. Holt, "Party Politics In Ohio, 1840-1850," Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society Publications, XXXVIII (January, 1929), p. 97.

[32]Ibid.

In 1844, Ohio cast a majority of its votes for Clay. The Democrats were defeated in Ohio because of the Buckeye State's aversion to the annexation of Texas, radical Democrat's disappointment over Van Buren's inability to capture the Democratic Convention's two-thirds majority vote, and the Garland forgery. The forgery helped defeat the Democrats because it influenced Whigs who were about to join the Liberty party to hold to their old loyalty for fear that Birney was actually working for the election of Polk.[33]

New York State's vote, however, was considered the most important cast. Polk carried the Empire State by a small majority, thereby gaining its electoral vote. The popular vote was Polk, 1,337,243 or 50 per cent; Clay, 1,299,062 or 48 per cent; and Birney, 62,300 or 2 per cent. Birney's candidacy in New York has been termed the first instance of a primary effect on an election result by a third party.[34] Polk garnered 170 electoral votes, while Clay could manage only 105. If New York's thirty-six votes were added to the Clay column, the Kentuckian would have won the election by seven electoral

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[33]Ibid., p. 102.

[34]Edgar E. Robinson, The Evolution of American Political Parties (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1924), p. 126.

votes. Naturally, the Whigs charged the Liberty men with complicity in Clay's defeat.

Lewis Tappan commented on the election to his English friend, Scoble.

> The Liberty party vote is greater than ever, & the whigs impute to this party the defeat of their candidate. The probability is that the whig party will be broken up, & be merged in a new party called the American Republican Party....[35]

Whig recriminations against the Liberty party appeared throughout the country. A Nile's National Register item charged that at least a part of the Liberty men favored Polk's election because he favored annexation and would thereby bring the North and South to a confrontation on the subject. The Register, in a bitter denunciation of the abolitionist leaders stated:

> Men whose prejudices against slavery are so strong, that they prefer a separation of the Union, to a longer connexion with states that tolerate it - The number of these is inconsiderable, but they make up for that in zeal, assurance, and industry & are amongst the leaders of the party. To them is owing the success of most of the measures that now spread disaffection so widely, and root it so deeply, as to threaten the integrity of the Union, if its growth be not providentially arrested.[36]

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[35]Abel and Klingberg, op. cit., pp. 194-195.

[36]Nile's National Register, [Baltimore, Maryland], December 21, 1844.

Whig reaction to the role played by the Liberty party in the 1844 election had a decided effect on the abolitionist political forces.

Since most antislavery men were members of the Whig party, and they were now alienated from the Liberty men, the Liberty program to convert members to their ranks appeared moribund. Liberals considered the Liberty men intolerant for accepting only the opinions of their own members. Practical minded voters, such as those in Ohio, thought the Liberty group should have forsaken Birney, and thereby influenced the Texas issue.[37] Old-line Whigs, distressed over the attacks directed at Clay, and convinced Birney was a Democrat in disguise, were unable to comprehend the nature of the Liberty party or of its leaders. A group composed of philanthropists, reformers, and agitators who were idealists, the Liberty party could not be expected to act as would a group of politicians, statesmen, and pragmatists. Pledged to support antislavery men, and continually reminded to act consistently, Liberty support for Clay would have been considered apostasy.

While a force in the American political arena, the Liberty men had not accomplished any of the goals they

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[37]Theodore C. Smith, The Liberty and Free Soil Parties in the Northwest (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967), pp. 80-81.

had set for themselves. After 1844, changes in the party's operation were considered an obvious necessity by many party members. Immediately after the election, Gerrit Smith made plans for a national liberty convention to meet in Albany during the year's final month. Stanton urged Smith to refrain from discussing party nominations at the Albany session since some abolitionists were displeased with the lack of political acumen displayed by Birney in the recent campaign.[38] While Leavitt assured Birney that he would be the unanimous choice of all, once the "fret and alarm" subsided,[39] plans were afoot not only to change the party's candidate, but to alter its policy.

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[38]Harlow, op. cit., p. 172.

[39]Joshua Leavitt to J.G. Birney, December 18, 1844, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, p. 889.

CHAPTER V

THE PARTY IN TRANSITION

From 1845 to 1847 the Liberty party struggled for its very existence. Diverse elements within the organization caused an open confrontation, and the eventual disruption of the party.

Immediately after the election of 1844 the Ohio leaders revived their plans for replacing James Birney as the party figurehead. William Birney warned his father of Bailey's actions and motives. "If he paused in his systematic treachery to you," the younger Birney cautioned, "it is only to gain strength for the onset." William feared that the actions of the Ohio leaders would injure the party irreparably; their hostility toward "old abolition principles" threatened the "verylife of the party."[1] Joshua Leavitt informed the twice-defeated candidate that some of the Ohioans supported Seward again. Leavitt suggested measures: "That must be checked, killed."[2] He warned that if the Ohio group could not be halted by any other means, an early presidential nomination might deter them.

But the Ohio coalitionists were not easily impeded. In the spring of 1845, Chase, Lewis and others began

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[1]William Birney to J.G. Birney, December 28, 1844, in Dwight L. Dumond (ed.), Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857 (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1966), II, pp. 893-894. Hereafter referred to as Birney Letters.

[2]Joshua Leavitt to J.G. Birney, January 25, 1845, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, p. 922.

obtaining signatures to a call for a Southern and Western Convention to be held in Cincinnati. Although most of the two thousand delegates who arrived in the Queen City in June were Liberty men, the call was directed at all who believed that the preservation of republicanism could be maintained only by "eternal and uncompromising war against ...the slave power,'" and the use of constitutional, honorable, and just means, to reduce slavery to "'its constitutional limits in the United States.'"[3] Members of all parties, slaveholders and non-slaveholders, and all interested in the Liberty movement and its probable results were invited to attend.[4]

From June 11 to 12, 1845, delegates from Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, New York, Virginia, and Rhode Island assembled to formulate policy. James G. Birney chaired the Southern and Western Convention of the Friends of Constitutional Liberty, while Chase composed the meeting's Address to the people. Although the Convention's planners intended to attract men of both political parties, few

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[3]Robert B. Warden, An Account of The Private Life and Public Services of Salmon Portland Chase (Cincinnati: Wilstach, Baldwin and Company, 1874), p. 304.

[4]Ibid.

attended. Supposedly because of personal affairs, Seward did not attend, but he commented that while he was in agreement with the antislavery sentiments of the Convention's resolves, he disagreed with the assertion that both parties' views on slavery were equal. He thought that the Whigs were the antislavery men of the land.[5]

While the Convention's resolutions, drawn up by Chase, were liberal, they could not be considered radical. The resolves enunciated broad principles, but made no mention of complete and immediate emancipation. Resolutions proclaimed the aims of the party: the divorce of the national government from slavery, prohibition of slave-holding in all places of exclusive national jurisdiction, the abolishment of the domestic slave trade, the discouragement of the system of work without wages, but not unconstitutional interference with the local legislation of particular states.[6]

Before the Cincinnati gathering, the prospect of converting the party to one of general reform was debated in various party circles. The Emancipator's editor

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[5]Edgar A. Holt, "Party Politics In Ohio, 1840-1850," Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly, XXXVIII (January, 1929), p. 126.

[6]Emancipator and Weekly Chronicle, [Boston], July 2, 1845.

commented on a resolution adopted by a New York meeting which advocated expansion of "one-ideaism." The editorial stated that as long as abolition was the paramount issue, party members could speak their minds on other problems, but warned that time was needed to reform the world.[7]

At Cincinnati the conventioneers noted that while they were not indifferent to questions of trade, currency, territorial extension, and other issues, they did not doubt that those who at present considered these questions subordinate to the greater question of personal rights, would satisfactorially adjust such matters when they possessed the power to do so. As a consolation to Liberty men, the resolve added that no other party could attain unanimity on all questions.[8]

When Chase submitted his Address to the public, Birney turned editor, and deleted passages in the writer's first draft which he considered as overtures to the radical Democrats, aimed at coalition.[9] Approval of Chase's exposition came after the revision of objectionable material. Perhaps the most important sentiments expressed

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[7]Ibid., March 12, 1845.

[8]Ibid., July 2, 1845.

[9]Betty L. Fladeland, James Gillespie Birney: Slaveholder To Abolitionist (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1955), pp. 254-255.

in the Cincinnati Address were those concerning the United States Constitution. The author noted that while Liberty men would "have the Constitution rightly construed and administered according to its true sense and spirit," the Liberty party did not wish to invade the Constitution.[10]

Chase declared that there was not a line in the Constitution which "refers to slavery as a national institution, to be upheld by national law."[11] He interpreted the Constitution as an antislavery document, since its creators, in his opinion, had not intended it to be construed as a proslavery one. He proposed to effect the extinction of slavery by divorcing the federal government from all vestitudes of slavery, by electing and appointing to public office avowed antislavery men, and by congressional resolutions declaring the unconstitutionality of slavery in all states which had been formed out of national territories, and by "recommending to the others states the immediate adoption of measures for its extinction within their respective limits...."[12]

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[10] The Address of the Southern and Western Liberty Convention, Held at Cincinnati, June 11 & 12, 1845, To The People of the United States, With Notes By A Citizen of Pennsylvania [n.p.], [n.d.], p. 3.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., p. 8.

During the summer of 1845, persistent rumors in the East hinted that the Liberty party was preparing to incorporate in its program abundant "anti-isms."[13] The rumors flew so furiously that a special convention of Liberty men met to clear up the controversy. The delegates assembled at Port Byron, New York, and considered the question of incorporating new issues in the party's platform. An address read at the meeting, apparently composed by William Goodell, advocated free trade, the direct election of the President and Vice-President, distribution of public lands, judicial reform, the end of "King Caucus," and other reforms.[14] The Convention, however, failed to agree on the desirability of converting the party to one of general reform.[15]

A meeting similar to the Cincinnati gathering convened October 1, 1845, in Boston, and was heralded as the "Great Convention of the Friends of Freedom In The Eastern and Middle States." Maine's General Samuel Fessenden presided over the deliberations. Resolutions

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[13]Ralph V. Harlow, Gerrit Smith, Philanthropist and Reformer (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1939), p. 176.

[14]Address Read At The New York State Liberty Convention, Held At Port Byron, On Wednesday & Thursday, July 25, and 26, 1845 [n.p.], 1845. p. 12.

[15]Harlow, loc. cit.

adopted at Boston reflected the opinions that abolition was the paramount concern of the party, that the 1793 fugitive slave law was unconstitutional, and the Constitution was an antislavery document.[16]

Informing Chase of the Boston proceedings, Henry Stanton lamented the fact that J.G. Whittier was unable to compose the Convention's address owing to ill health. In Whittier's absence, Gerrit Smith prepared the address. Stanton considered Smith's work "able, strong, calm, but quite elementary...." He thought the resolutions adopted were "safe on the constitutional question," and apprised Chase of the presence of Lysander Spooner who prepared a resolve.

> A long series was introduced by Mr. Spooner, embodying the views in his recent pamphlet. We did not adopt them, but merely referred them to the committee of publication to print with the proceedings.[17]

In a final note, Stanton added that the meeting had stuck to the one idea, and that it did not mention the presidential nomination.[18]

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[16] Emancipator and Weekly Chronicle, October 8, 1845.

[17] H.B. Stanton to S.P. Chase, October 6, 1845, in S.H. Dodson (compiler), "Diary and Correspondence of Salmon P. Chase," (Washington, D.C.: Annual Report of the American Historical Association For The Year 1902, 1903), II, p. 466.

[18] Ibid., p. 467.

The argument professed by Lysander Spooner, and discussed Boston, was that the Constitution of the United States was an antislavery document. Spooner's views, expounded in his monograph, The Unconstitutionality of Slavery, were based on a natural rights philosophy. He declared that the Constitution embodied a compact of the people, and that since the federal Constitution was the supreme law of the land, slavery authorized by state constitutions was made illegal by the adoption of the national document.[19] Since the federal Constitution was formed, at least in theory, for the benefit of all the people of the nation, he reasoned that the federal government possessed the power to secure the benefits of liberty for all its populace. This could be accomplished by assuring the personal liberty of all citizens. The writ of habeas corpus was an instrument, placed in the government's hands by the Constitution's framers, for the assurance of the personal liberty of the nation's citizenry.[20] Spooner's contention was that slavery existed unconstitutionally not only in the territories, and the District of Columbia, but in all the states.

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[19]Lysander Spooner, The Unconstitutionality of Slavery (New York: Burt Franklin, 1965), Part II, pp. 271-273. New edition.

[20]Ibid., pp. 274-275.

William Goodell arrived at the same conclusion about the unconstitutionality of slavery as did Spooner. However, Goodell deduced his theory by a different method than that Spooner had employed. He based his arguments on the belief that the federal government could end slavery through the implementation of its power over the interstate commerce.[21] Goodell claimed that since a republican form of government had been guaranteed to all the states by the Constitution, and the slave states had violated this guarantee, the federal government possessed the power to rid the country of slavery.[22] A proponent of the Higher Law or Universal Law doctrine, Goodell asserted that a civil government, based on a constitution that tolerated slavery, was an "absurdity" that could not exist.[23]

Gerrit Smith also interpreted the Constitution as an antislavery document. A believer in the Higher Law of God, Smith reasoned that the federal governing document was antislavery because it omitted the word slave in its text. He also arrived at a unique conclusion concerning

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[21]William Goodell, View of American Constitutional Law, In Its Bearing Upon American Slavery (Utica, New York; Lawson and Chaplin, 1845), 2d. ed. rev., p. 45.

[22]Ibid., pp. 47-48.

[23]Ibid., p. 154.

the three-fifths or apportionment clause. The New Yorker claimed that the three-fifths clause was a "'bounty on liberty,'" an indignity, aimed at inducing the abolition of slavery.[24]

Liberty men subscribed to one of two constitutional doctrines. Some agreed with Spooner, Goodell, and Smith, and viewed the Constitution as an antislavery document, consequently, reasoning that slavery in any state or territory was unconstitutional. Others, along with antislavery men of the other parties, insisted that statute or municipal law had created slavery, and that the institution could not legally exist beyond state boundaries.[25] Strangely, although he subscribed to the natural rights philosophy and the Higher Law doctrine, James G. Birney had agreed with the municipal law theory at the inception of the new party.[26] Birney's views changed, either by evolution or revolution, and by 1847 he openly adhered to the antislavery interpretation of the

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[24]Octavius B. Frothingham, Gerrit Smith: A Biography (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1878), p. 174.

[25]Dwight L. Dumond, Antislavery: The Crusade for Freedom in America (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1961), p. 302.

[26]Fladeland, op. cit., p. 264.

federal document. He now claimed that the Preamble to the Constitution, the character of its framers, and the natural rights of the individual, compelled Congress to abolish all slavery.[27]

The importance of the constitutional argument cannot be overemphasized. The Liberty party called for the abolition of slavery in the territories, and the District of Columbia, and for the end of the interstate slave trade, but had refrained from insisting that the federal government should abolish slavery in the Southern states. Garrison's calls for disunion, and fear of fanatical abolitionists inciting slaves to insurrect was a compelling reason for the establishment of an abolition party. As an organized political party they could prove to the public their disdain for radicalism. Yet arguments over the constitutionality of slavery contributed to the eventual splintering of the political organization. Resolutions adopted at an Indiana Antislavery Convention in 1845 indicate the mood of many, but not all, of the abolitionists concerning the Constitution. The Indiana conventioneers declared all laws which

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[27] Ibid.

established and maintained slavery to be "in conflict with God's law" and thus null and void.[28] Another resolution adopted at the April convention claimed that since the Constitution had been "ordained for the purpose of establishing justice and securing the blessings of liberty," that instrument was antislavery by its very nature.[29]

Another issue openly discussed in 1845 and 1846 concerned the idea of transforming the party into a general reform movement. This question added to the factionalism that occurred in the declining years of the party. During the 1844 election, James Birney realized that a candidate for national office must express opinions on all issues of concern to the public. Appropriately, Birney and a group of Michigan abolitionists spearheaded a movement aimed at the discontinuance of the one idea policy. Though issues other than emancipation concerned abolitionists, the Liberty party took no definite stand on questions such as the tariff, public lands, and the national bank. Individual members of the party made their opinions known, but the party organization refrained from expressing an explicit governmental program.

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[28] Emancipator and Weekly Chronicle, May 14, 1845.

[29] Ibid.

Arguments explaining the party's reluctancy to take a stand on issues other than abolition appeared frequently. Members feared that the great moral question of the sin of slaveholding would be subordinated to lesser issues.[30] Also some thought that the incorporation, in the party's platform, of ideas other than abolition would indicate a vulnerability to partyism. Perhaps the greatest motive for holding to one-ideaism was the apprehension that other questions would distract and divide the party ranks, and lead to the weakening and eventual destruction of the abolition party.[31] Birney and his Michigan friends disagreed with this assumption.

Theodore Foster and Guy Beckly, editors of a Michigan abolitionist paper, the Signal of Liberty, collaborated with Birney in the effort to broaden the party's program. Foster judged that should the party continue to refrain from acting on questions of national and state policy, the Liberty organization would never attain a majority of votes in the free states, much less in the nation.[32]

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[30] Ibid., April 22, 1846.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Theodore Foster to J.G. Birney, July 7, 1845, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, p. 951.

Birney reasoned that a party limited to one particular object would eventually disappear. He expressed the opinion that the party had to be prepared to take on all or none of the administration of the government.[33]

Foster thought that the greatest problem to be solved by Liberty men was the question of coalition with the Whigs of the North. If the Northern Whigs took an antislavery stand, he predicted the dissolution of the Liberty party.[34] The move to incorporate interests other than abolition in the party program was then, at least in part, a plan of survival.

Birney and the Michigan editors presented their plans for broadening the party's platform at the Michigan State Anti-Slavery Society's anniversary meeting in early 1846. Foster and Beckley attended the meeting, but Birney, after a riding accident, suffered paralysis, and thereafter could not be present at party functions. The former Liberty presidential nominee presented his plans for reform in a letter to the state convention's president. Birney advocated

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[33]J. G. Birney to Lewis Tappan, September 12, 1845, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, p. 970.

[34]Theodore Foster to J. G. Birney, October 16, 1845, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, pp. 979-980.

the reduction of the powers, patronage and salary of the President of the United States, the gradual abolition of the army and navy, and lessening travel allowances for congressmen.[35] Foster added to Birney's suggestions; he called for a thorough judicial reform, the election of more national and state officials, the single district system of electing legislators, and requiring full individual responsibility of members in financial or commercial corporations.[36] The Michigan Convention, however, took no favorable action on the Birney-Foster plan. Foster thought that the reluctancy of Liberty men to accept a general reform program stemmed from their religious beliefs. Most of the leaders and political speakers were ministers; thus they were blind to anything but the one idea.[37]

Party transformation met with opposition throughout the party ranks. Lewis Tappan feared the party would be weakened by the addition of new issues. Yet, if the abolitionists in general favored reformation, he was resigned

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[35]J.G. Birney to the President of the Michigan State Anti-Slavery Society, January 1, 1846, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, pp. 993-995.

[36]Theodore Foster to J.G. Birney, December 7, 1845, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, p. 983.

[37]Theodore Foster to J.G. Birney, March 30, 1846, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, p. 1008.

to accept their decision.[38] Gerrit Smith, though in favor of a general reform movement, thought such a policy premature for the party. Smith noted that in matters of civil government, the Liberty party members showed ignorance, though not as extensively as those of other parties.[39] Gamaliel Bailey opposed the introduction of questions other than slavery in party conventions, yet he advocated their discussion by individuals within the party.[40]

A Northwestern Convention, held in Chicago, in 1846, served as a forum for the general reform plan. Beckley and Foster attended and promoted their ideas. The Chicago meeting refused to accept the reform party idea. Instead, the delegates passed the following motion:

> Resolved, That we regard the question of Slavery as the greatest political question now agitated before the country, and are determined not to sacrifice or defer the cause of Freedom to any other political measure.[41]

Beckley proposed an amendment to the resolution which

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[38]Lewis Tappan to J.G. Birney, March 10, 1846, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, p. 1006.

[39]Gerrit Smith to the Liberty party, May 7, 1846, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, note, p. 1020.

[40]The Cincinnati Weekly Herald and Philanthropist, April 1, 1846. Also known as The Philanthropist.

[41]The Liberty Tree, [Chicago] , July 1, 1846.

promised to sustain the slavery question as the paramount issue of the Liberty party, but also to recognize the importance of the equal political and civil rights of all men. Beckley's arguments for the amendment included the assertion that unless the Liberty party took actions recommended in the resolution, some other party would.[42] However, his arguments did not prevail, and after a long discussion, the amendment failed to pass.

Foster, dejected over the Convention's actions, thought the party men were intent on political suicide. He saw opposition to the reform movement in two segments of the party: the ministry, and the Ohio leadership. He noted that ministers, who made up a majority of the party, opposed becoming too political. They saw the party as a religious organization. Foster thought that the Ohio leaders looked for union somewhere. He predicted that Ohioans would unite with Whigs locally, and on a national basis would sustain northern antislavery men of both parties.[43] Men who favored the one idea would coalesce with other parties because they desired relief from the laborious yet unprogressive separate organization. Those

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[42]Ibid.

[43]Theodore Foster to J.G. Birney, August 1, 1846, Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, p. 1026.

who favored a general reform party would leave the Liberty fold because they saw that the abolitionist party would not take the only stand on which it could survive.[44]

Foster's fears were justifiable. Chase's moves to form an antislavery coalition continued after the Cincinnati meeting. The coalitionists found support among disgruntled antislavery Whigs and Democrats, and Liberty men who feared their party would never succeed. After the annexation of Texas, disagreements with Mexico over the proper boundary of the new state, led to war. The Mexican War which lasted from 1846 to 1848, precipitated a furious congressional debate. The prospective acquisition of additional territory prompted the introduction of the Wilmot Proviso, a measure proposed by a Democratic representative from Pennsylvania, David Wilmot. The Proviso first appeared as an amendment to President Polk's request for funds to be used to facilitate negotiations with Mexico. The amendment stated that slavery would be excluded from any territory acquired from Mexico with the appropriated monies. Wilmot's provision passed the House twice, but failed to get by the Senate. During the debate over the Proviso, the Whigs attacked the pros-

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[44] Ibid.

ecution of the Mexican War, charging that the war was an expansionist move, urged on by Southern slaveholders. Antislavery men of all parties found a common issue in the Proviso's demands and defeat.

Antislavery feeling in the older parties, stimulated by the Wilmot Proviso, led to their fusion with Liberty men in many local elections.[45] Salmon Chase's coalition schemes were boosted, and he corresponded with Whig and Democratic antislavery politicians. He informed Joshua Giddings that while he could not compromise principles and consistent action, he was willing to give up "'names and separate organization.'"[46] Chase explained his plans to John P. Hale, an antislavery Democratic representative from New Hampshire. The Ohioan feared that the Liberty party would never accomplish its goals. Chase stated that as fast as Liberty men could "'bring public sentiment right,'" the other parties would approach Liberty ground and keep sufficiently close to it to prevent any great accession to the abolitionist party.[47] To combat the problem,

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[45]Joseph C. Rayback, "The Liberty Party Leaders of Ohio: Exponents of Anti-Slavery Coalition," Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly, LVII (1948), p. 174.

[46]Jacob W. Schuckers, The Life And Public Services of Salmon Portland Chase, United States Senator and Governor of Ohio, Secretary of the Treasury, And Chief-Justice of the United States (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1874), p. 100.

[47]Warden, op. cit., p. 313.

he suggested an antislavery league, composed of antislavery men of both parties and Liberty men. The fundamental aim of the league would be the election of men opposed to the extension and in favor of the denationalization of slavery. When the existing parties failed to nominate such men, the league would nominate candidates independently, while refraining from establishing a permanent party.[48]

Although there were more abolitionists in the Whig party than in the Democratic organization, Chase did not look with hope to the Whigs. He thought that the Whigs would always view the overthrow of slavery as "'work to be taken up or laid aside....'" The Ohio leader had more faith in the Democratic party, and believed that once the Democrats were convinced that the overthrow of slavery was legitimate and necessary, the work would be accomplished.[49] Chase contacted Charles Sumner in 1847, and noted that the policy of practical antislavery activists should not be neutralization of each other's efforts, but political union. He suggested that they could unite on measures such as the Wilmot Proviso and abolition in the District of Columbia.[50]

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[48] Ibid., p. 314.

[49] Ibid.

[50] S.P. Chase to Charles Sumner, September 22, 1847, in S.H. Dodson (compiler), "Chase Correspondence," op. cit., II, p. 123.

Although Chase desired coalition with the Democrats, the Whigs gained Liberty adherents more readily. The defeat of the Wilmot Proviso, and the antislavery activities of Joshua Giddings caused Ohio Liberty men to consider coordinating their efforts with the Whigs.[51] However, some Liberty adherents, while agreeing with the Whigs in theory, could not find amicable methods in their antislavery program, since many Whigs would not agree to the Liberty principle of refusing to vote for any slaveholder.[52]

Elizur Wright reported from Massachusetts that the Mexican War aroused people in the New England state, and made "a hearing for the Slave" much easier than before.[53] The rising feeling throughout the commonwealth pushed the Whig legislature farther than before on anti-slavery matters.

Gamaliel Bailey helped spread the coalitionist's ideas throughout the party.[54] The Chicago Convention had

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[51]Fladeland, op. cit., p. 260.

[52]American Freeman, [Prairieville, Wisconsin], October 6, 1846.

[53]Elizur Wright to J.G. Birney, February 8, 1847, in Dumond, Birney Letters, op. cit., II, p. 1040.

[54]Rayback, loc. cit.

suggested the establishment of a national party organ in Washington, D. C. Subsequently, the National Era began publication in 1847, with Bailey at the helm. The ideas of the new paper's editor, therefore, reached a majority of the party rank and file. Since Birney's accident left him incapacitated, his influence dwindled, and the prestige of the leaders from Ohio increased.

In the congressional and state elections of 1845 and 1846, support for antislavery Whigs resulted in the failure of the Liberty party to advance to any appreciable degree. Along with the introduction of the Proviso, the subsequent upsurge of antislavery feeling, and the coalition movement, the poor showing in the off-year elections, helped to create a desire for change in the minds of Liberty men.[55] Birney's general reform program had been rejected by the main body of the party. Thus, throughout 1847, the issue of organizational change led all others in party discussions.

Arguments concerning constitutional interpretation and one-ideaism had not split the party, yet three well attended conventions failed to settle problems. Rigid opinions were formed in the minds of many Liberty men. Obviously, Chase and his Ohio friends had not ceased bidding

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[55] Ibid.

for coalition with the antislavery men of the other parties. Birney continued to favor the incorporation of other issues in the party's program, and opposed political union with Whigs and Democrats. Rising Northern antislavery opinion, spurred on by the Wilmot Proviso's defeat, seemed to indicate that Chase's plan would win out over Birney's.

CHAPTER VI

THE LIBERTY PARTY IN DECLINE

In 1847, Liberty men stood at a crossroads. The issue of proper action to be taken in changing the party's methods and program became the major question discussed by leaders and rank and file members. A movement appeared in Western New York, in early, 1847, however, and forced the conciliation of divergent ideas.

Throughout the early months of 1847, reports of a secession from the party abounded in Whig newspapers. The American Freeman, a Wisconsin Liberty publication, noted that the abolitionist press had not verified rumors of an Ontario County, New York, abolitionist convention, reportedly held in December, 1846, for the purpose of dissolving the Liberty party.[1] The Freeman considered the reports a hoax; but added that if the rumors proved valid, the convention's participants probably desired to broaden the one idea principle to one of human equality, and thereby thwart coalitionist's efforts.[2]

Soon the Albany Patriot verified the Whig releases.

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[1]American Freeman, [Prairieville, Wisconsin], February 17, 1847.

[2]Ibid.

William Goodell, one of the convention's leaders, informed the Patriot's editor of the reasons he backed the Western New York movement. Goodell wanted a party pledged to the abolition of slavery through the guarantee of a republican form of government throughout the Union, and the end of the Customs House and monopolies. The New Yorker favored land limitation, free distribution of public lands, security of the homestead, and other reforms.[3] The Freeman's editor refuted the assertion that Goodell and his friends disbanded the party. He claimed that the New Yorkers aimed at extending Liberty efforts into all areas of political activity which demanded the valid concern of any national political party.[4]

Meanwhile, the New Yorkers continued their activities, and in April called for a national convention to meet at Macedon Lock, New York, for the purpose of nominating candidates for the offices of President and Vice-President of the United States. The Macedon Call, drafted by Goodell, explained the motives which guided its signers.

> We do say distinctly, and with great confidence, that without a consistent, well defined and dis-

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[3] Ibid., February 24, 1847.

[4] Ibid.

> tinctly enunciated declaration of its position on all the great practical questions before the country, and in which the rights of the citizens, the security of our liberties, as well as the liberation of the slaves, are together involved, the Liberty party cannot, in the very nature of the case, escape absorption in one of the other political parties, to the shipwreck of all the objects for which it was originally organized, including, signally, the defeat for the present generation of the anti-slavery enterprise, so far as political action is concerned.[5]

Prior to the issuance of the call, Goodell asked James Birney to add his name to the paper, and indicated that the conventioneers would nominate their "old friend" in the West as their presidential candidate.[6] The former Friend of Man editor sent Birney a copy of the rough draft of the call he had prepared.

A declaration of sentiments, appended to Goodell's call, served as a platform for the New York meeting. The statement designated the principles contained in the Declaration of Independence as the true foundation of civil government, The paper declared monopolies, class legislation, and exclusive privileges, subversive of the ends of government, as well as

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[5]Call For A National Nominating Convention, June 8-10, 1847, at Macedon Lock, New York [n.p.], 1847. p. 8.

[6]William Goodell to J.G. Birney, April 1, 1847, in Dwight L. Dumond (ed.), Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857 (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1966), II, p. 1047.

unequal, unjust, and morally wrong. The declaration called for abolition of the tariff and secret societies, and inception of judicial reform. Measures proposed included distribution of the public lands, a homestead exemption law, and direct taxation. Goodell also termed slavery in the United States, "illegal, unconstitutional, an anti-republican."[7] The New Yorker and his followers based their reasons for action on the assumption that the Liberty party, a national and permanent organization, pledged itself, by actions of successive national conventions, to the main principles enunciated in the Macedon Declaration. Yet, Goodell charged that the party failed to apply these principles, and that Liberty leaders had discussed reforms in an abstract manner, rather than presenting concrete arguments and solutions.[8]

The Macedon meeting took place as scheduled, adopted Goodell's platform, and nominated Gerrit Smith for President, and Elihu Burritt as his running-mate. Since the group separated from the main body of the Liberty party, they called their organization the Liberty League.

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[7] Ibid., pp. 1049-1051.

[8] Ibid., pp. 1052-1054.

Although he backed the movement, Burritt declined the League's nomination and Charles C. Foote ran in his place. The Liberty party old guard, led by Joshua Leavitt, immediately demanded that a National Liberty Convention convene, and nominate candidates for national office.[9]

James Birney allowed his name to be affixed to the Macedon Declaration, although he was unable to attend the convention.[10] Young America, organ of the Land Reformers, hailed the League's formation as a means of strengthening both groups and proposed running the same candidates.[11] Gerrit Smith wrote the Macedon Committee of his support for the movement; Smith wished the party had initiated the Macedon program. He noted that the third party was formed for the single purpose of overthrowing slavery, (a contradiction of some of his former statements,) yet he did not deny that, so far as their authority permitted, earlier Liberty conventions had committed the party to other objects.[12]

Smith's readiness to align with the Liberty League showed obvious inconsistency on his part. Previously

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[9]Emancipator, [Boston], June 16, 1847.

[10]Betty L. Fladeland, James Gillespie Birney: Slaveholder To Abolitionist (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1955), p. 262.

[11]American Freeman [Waukesha, Wisconsin], June 9, 1847, citing National Era.

[12]Ibid., July 21, 1847.

he had opposed Birney's general reform party. When the sage of Peterboro came out squarely for the League, he explained that he did so because the other parties refused to accept their obligations to human rights, and the Liberty party, forced to strive for a permanent place in American politics, could achieve power by advocating free trade, land reform, and equal rights and justice for all men.[13]

Lewis Tappan, spokesman for the national Liberty organization, scolded Smith for backing the secessionist group, and denied the League's right to act independently of the party's National Committee.[14] Smith's refusal to renounce the League and unite with his old friends, ended prior considerations, on the part of some party members, of his nomination for the Liberty presidential candidacy.[15]

The Liberty party had thus split on the issues of one-ideaism, and the constitutionality of slavery. While many Liberty men, such as Chase, admitted that the Constitution professed antislavery principles, they refused to assert that municipal or statute law could not institute

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[13]Ralph V. Harlow, Gerrit Smith, Philanthropist and Reformer (New York; Henry Holt and Company, 1939), p. 179.

[14]Frederick J. Blue, "A History of the Free Soil Party," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1966), p. 9.

[15]Harlow, op. cit., p. 180.

slavery, (thus, slavery in the South was legal). The Liberty League, then, represented the party's most extreme element. When the League members bolted the Liberty party, they made the coalitionist's task an easier one.[16]

While Leavitt and the Eastern old guard pressed for fall nominations, amalgamationists, prompted by the Ohio leaders, urged that such action be postponed until mid-1848. Stanley Matthews, editor of the Cincinnati Herald, successor to The Philanthropist, regretted efforts to precipitate a fall nominating convention. The Herald labeled the efforts of The Emancipator and other influential papers inexpedient, and suggested that nominations take place no earlier than May, 1848.[17] The Cincinnati paper openly called for coalition when it noted that antislavery men, alienated from other parties, might join the Liberty party in "confining the curse of human slavery to its constitutional limits."[18] The publication called for a nominee who would be acceptable to all the antislavery voters of the country.

Chase pushed for postponement of nominations, as did Gamaliel Bailey. After receiving a notice of a proposed

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[16]Blue, loc. cit.

[17]National Press and Cincinnati Weekly Herald, April 21, 1847.

[18]Ibid.

call for a fall convention, Chase wrote Joshua Leavitt, explaining that the Ohio Liberty men favored postponing nominations until May or June, 1848. The Cincinnatian advocated calling a convention open to all "honest opponents of slavery." He suggested Pittsburgh as the most appropriate city to host the convention, owing to its close proximity to the border slave states, where antislavery sentiment existed.[19] The Cincinnati Herald editor backed Chase's plan and called for a national convention of all antislavery men aimed at "an irresistible union."[20]

Bailey's editorials in the National Era supported delaying nominations until the other parties named their candidates.[21] If the coalitionists proved correct in their opinion that the Democratic and Whig conventions would nominate proslavery candidates, the way would be clear to absorb the antislavery elements of those parties. Chase was sure General Zachary Taylor, a slaveholder, would receive the Whig nomination. The Ohioan thought Taylor's

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[19]S.P. Chase to Joshua Leavitt, June 16, 1847, in S.H. Dodson (compiler), "Diary and Correspondence of Salmon P. Chase," (Washington, D.C.: Annual Report of the American Historical Association For The Year 1902, 1903), II, p. 117.

[20]National Press and Cincinnati Weekly Herald, June 23, 1847.

[21]Joseph C. Rayback, "The Liberty Party Leaders of Ohio: Exponents of Anti-Slavery Coalition," Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly, LVII (1948), p. 176.

candidacy would force the Northern Democracy to stand on antislavery principles.

Chase confessed that he regarded the Liberty party as a means to the eventual end of slavery, and nothing more.[22] He saw actions of the Macedon Convention as an indication that the times required a different instrument than the Liberty party for the overthrow of slavery.[23] Chase actively supported Silas Wright's presidential candidacy on an antislavery platform. If Wright, the liberal Democratic Governor of New York, would run on the Wilmot Proviso, and a return to the Ordinance of 1787, Chase promised his support.[24]

While Chase promoted Wright's candidacy on a coalition ticket, the Eastern wing of the Liberty party urged the nomination of John P. Hale of New Hampshire. A committee met with Hale in Boston, and quizzed the antislavery Democrat on his views, position, and availability as a presidential candidate. Lewis Tappan, C.D. Cleveland, and H.B. Stanton, along with others, were appointed to

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[22]S.P. Chase to John Thomas, June 24, 1847, in S.H. Dodson (compiler), "Chase Correspondence," op. cit., II, p. 119.

[23]Ibid., p. 120.

[24]S.P. Chase to Preston King, July 15, 1847, in S.H. Dodson (compiler), "Chase Correspondence," op. cit., II, p. 121.

correspond with Hale about his possible acceptance of the Liberty presidential nomination.[25]

Some of Hale's attitudes toward abolition had tainted him in the eyes of Liberty party members. He had exhibited a reluctancy to admit the unconstitutionality of slavery in the District of Columbia, and favor prohibition of the interstate slave trade.[26] After the introduction of the Wilmot Proviso, Hale moved closer, at least in principle, to the Liberty position; at the same time, the Liberty group began to look for a standard-bearer who could attract antislavery men away from other parties.[27]

Many of the New Hampshire Senator-elect's friends urged that he discourage Liberty efforts to draft his nomination. They thought that alignment with a minority party, at a time when antislavery sentiment ran high throughout the major organizations, would be unwise and inconsequential.[28] By September, 1847, Chase had decided to back Hale as the leader of an independent party. Silas

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[25]H.B. Stanton to S.P. Chase, August 6, 1847, in S.H. Dodson (compiler) "Chase Correspondence," op. cit., II, p. 467.

[26]Richard H. Sewell, John P. Hale And The Politics of Abolition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 88.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Ibid., p. 90.

Wright died in August, and perhaps the untimely death forced Chase to look to Hale as the savior of his antislavery Democracy plan. However, Chase adamantly opposed a fall nomination, and counseled Hale to maintain his independent role in the Senate, and refrain from allying with the declining Liberty group.[29]

The chief proponent of Hale's Liberty candidacy, John G. Whittier, urged that Hale openly avow his availability, and support of the Eastern leadership's actions. The poet laureate of abolitionism advised the new Senator that the nomination would place him in a "stronger position" in Congress, and would dispel rumors that he was "playing into the hands of the Whigs...."[30] Stanton, and seemingly, Lewis Tappan, also pressed Hale for a public utterance that "while not actively seeking the Liberty nomination, he would, for the good of the cause, accept it if it were offered."[31] Hale, confused over conflicting advice, hinted that, if drafted by the Liberty party, he might accept out of a sense of obligation to his friends.[32]

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[29]Ibid., p. 91.

[30]Samuel T. Pickard, Life And Letters Of John Greenleaf Whittier (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1894), I, pp. 319-320.

[31]Sewell, op. cit., p. 92.

[32]Ibid.

Controversy concerning the timing of a Liberty nomination ended when the party's general committee called a convention to meet October 20, 1847, at Buffalo. Chase continued to appeal for postponement of the nominations until the spring or early summer of 1848. He urged anti-slavery Whigs and Democrats to attend the October meeting, and lend their aid to his plan, so that they could "form a powerful party of Independents in the Spring."[33] However, the Cincinnatian's plans did not prevail since Stanton, Leavitt, and Tappan personally directed the fortunes of the reluctant Hale when the National Liberty Convention convened.[34] Chase's motion to postpone nominations was overwhelmingly defeated by the assembly. Although the party old guard dominated the issue of immediate nominations, Chase and the coalitionists thereafter took control.[35]

Joshua Leavitt, backed by Chase, presented resolutions which the assembly accepted, but not without a fight from Gerrit Smith and the Liberty Leaguers present. The adopted resolutions stated that the object of the Liberty

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[33]S.P. Chase to Charles Sumner, September 22, 1847, in S.H. Dodson (compiler), "Chase Correspondence," op. cit., II, p. 123.

[34]Sewell, loc. cit.

[35]Rayback, op. cit., p. 177.

party was to strive for the abolition of slavery in a constitutional manner, and that the Constitution did not empower the government with the right to institute slavery. Smith attempted to amend two resolutions, but his opinions did not prevail. An important resolution asserted that slavery was unconstitutional in the territories. Smith moved that the resolve declare slavery unconstitutional in the states as well as the territories.[36] The delegates rejected Smith's amendment by a vote of 195-137.[37] Another resolve Smith wished to change stated that the duties of antislavery congressmen were to vote for abolition in the District of Columbia, for the repeal of the 1793 fugitive slave law, and against the introduction of slavery into the territories.[38] Smith asserted that the party "should no longer delay to studying and inculcating all the duties," which it would have to consider when it took over the administration of the government.[39] The Liberty Leaguer thought the party should oppose not only slavery, but also land monopolies, commercial restrictions, and secret

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[36] American Freeman, December 8, 1847.

[37] Ibid., February 16, 1848.

[38] Ibid., November 3, 1847.

[39] Ibid., December 8, 1847.

societies.[40] His attempt to engender the general reform movement of the League into the program of the Liberty party failed when Leavitt's more conservative resolve passed without a struggle.

In the early hours of the Convention, Hale's candidacy seemed in jeopardy. Many party members, notably Easterners, hesitated to back the candidacy of "such a recent convert to their cause."[41] Also, Hale's wavering attitude concerning the constitutionality of interfering with the interstate slave trade troubled many delegates. Some held back support of the New Englander's candidacy without noting the reasons motivating their actions.[42] However, with the backing of Leavitt, Tappan, and Chase, Hale's fortunes rose, and he was nominated by 103 votes, while Smith accumulated only 44 supporters. At the convention, the main reason delegates gave for nominating Hale was that if they did not take such action, a National Wilmot Proviso Convention would, and thus, the Liberty party would be submerged in a coalition movement.[43]

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[40] Harlow, op. cit., p. 181.

[41] Sewell, op. cit., p. 93.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., note, p. 258.

Probably owing to the influence of Chase and his Ohio friends, some of the Buffalo delegates showed a willingness to compromise. While Chase failed to accomplish his goal of postponing nominations, he favored the resolutions adopted, and the candidacy of Hale. While some of the members hesitated before granting Hale their support, they reconciled any doubts, and agreed his candidacy seemed paramount to the survival of the organization. The League adherents alone had "been routed at every point."[44] The failure of Smith and his followers to convince the party of the necessity and desirability of their program, in essence, proved the failure of political abolitionism as exemplified by the Liberty party. Rather than a known abolitionist, the party nominated an Independent Democrat. Vaguity, religious overtones, and idealism prevalent in resolutions adopted by earlier Liberty meetings were supplanted by a more practical platform. The important positions delegated to Ohio Liberty men such as Samuel Lewis, who presided over the proceedings, and Leicester King, Hale's running-mate, indicated that the leadership of the party drifted steadily from East to West. Thus, the way "had been smoothed" for

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[44]Theodore C. Smith, The Liberty and Free Soil Parties in The Northwest (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967), 2d. ed., p. 120.

the incorporation of the Liberty party into the larger free soil movement.[45]

While Liberty publications wrote of rising support for Hale throughout antislavery circles, the candidate waited until January, 1848, to formally accept the nomination.[46] When Hale finally accepted, his response exhibited hesitancy. To Liberty men who wondered if he was a true Liberty party man, Hale answered yes, if by a party man they meant one who supported the 1847 platform, but no, if joining the Liberty fold required subjecting oneself to the supervision of party officers and committees.[47]

At the October Convention the delegates agreed to call a subsequent convention if the action seemed necessary. With this in mind, Hale stated in his acceptance letter, that should a broader based antislavery coalition be formed, he would gladly step aside and join the larger movement.[48] Evidence of Hale's "genuine eagnerness to avoid Presidential candidacy" prompted his biographer to state that

> ...it would appear that Hale purposely accepted the Liberty nomination to avoid

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[45]Blue, op. cit., p. 16.

[46]American Freeman, December 22, 1847.

[47]Sewell, op. cit., pp. 95-96.

[48]Ibid.

> becoming a freesoil candidate, and at the same time to smooth the way for a merging of the Liberty party in a more inclusive antislavery movement.[49]

Indeed, antislavery sentiment that had gradually begun to influence the Whig and Democratic parties rapidly increased, and accomplished what the Liberty men had strived toward since their organization in 1840, namely, the splitting of the old parties in almost every Northern state.[50]

The slavery issue was interjected into the Democratic National Convention which met May 22, 1848. In New York State, the Democrats had split into two factions, the Barnburners and the Hunkers. The Barnburners, supporters of the Wilmot Proviso, refused to endorse the Democratic presidential nominee, Lewis Cass of Michigan. The Whig National Convention met in June, at Philadelphia, and nominated General Zachary Taylor, but not without opposition from the antislavery delegates from New England and Ohio.

A week before the Whig Convention an appeal calling for a Free Territory Mass Convention at Columbus, Ohio,

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[49] Ibid., p. 96.

[50] Smith, op. cit., p. 121.

and signed by three thousand voters, appeared in Ohio newspapers.[51] Chase penned the Convention call which declared the meeting's purpose to be the consideration of the political condition of the country, and any action required should proslavery presidential candidates by presented by the Whigs and Democrats.[52]

After Taylor's Philadelphia nomination a group of dissatisfied Whigs met in a committee room, and made plans to hold a Free Soil Convention at Buffalo. In order to get a nonpartisan call, the Whigs asked the Ohio Free Territory Convention to issue it.[53] Such a call was approved by the June 20, Columbus meeting. Chase reported the Convention's mood to Charles Sumner:

> Our Convention has just commenced its session. A large delegation from almost every Congressional District is in attendance. Great enthusiasm and fixedness of purpose are manifested. The delegates from the Reserve say that if a suitable free State Candidate is named, the Reserve will give him [a] 13,000 majority over Cass or Taylor and will try hard to roll it up to twenty thousand.[54]

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[51]Edgar A. Holt, "Party Politics In Ohio, 1840-1850," Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly, XXXVIII (January, 1929), p. 288.

[52]Robert B. Warden, An Account Of The Private Life and Public Services of Salmon Portland Chase (Cincinnati: Wilstach, Baldwin and Company, 1874), p. 316.

[53]Smith, op. cit., p. 129.

[54]S.P. Chase to Charles Sumner, June 20, 1848, in S.H. Dodson (compiler), "Chase Correspondence," op. cit., II, p. 137.

Chase, Samuel Lewis, and Stanley Matthews had called for a State Liberty Convention to meet at Columbus on the same day the Free Territory meeting took place. The Ohio leaders intended to sway the action of the People's Convention. The state's Liberty men met and approved the plan of the larger Convention to meet August 1, in Buffalo. However, probably fearing other actions might alienate the national commitee, the party would support no candidate who would not adhere to Liberty principles.[55]

Chase wrote Sumner that he supposed the "New York Democracy" would nominate a candidate of their own. He hoped that the Barnburner Democrats would "yield to the representations...made to them and invite a General Conference or Convention."[56] The secessionist Democrats did nominate Martin Van Buren at a Utica, New York Convention, and they issued a call, simultaneous with the Columbus gathering, for a national convention of independent men devoted to the free soil doctrine.

A mass meeting, similar to the Ohio People's Columbus Convention, assembled in Worcester, Massachusetts, June 28,

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[55]Smith, op. cit., p. 133.

[56]S.P. Chase to Charles Sumner, June 20, 1848, in S.H. Dodson (compiler), "Chase Correspondence," op. cit., II, p. 137.

and approved the actions of the Whig delegates who withdrew from their party's convention in protest. The assembly heard speeches by Charles Sumner, Joshua Giddings, and others, and invited an alliance with the Utica Barnburners.[57] The Columbus and Worcester Free Soil meetings exhibited the rising antislavery movement throughout the North.

While the events of the summer of 1848 had gone beyond the "wildest dreams" of Liberty men, they had also gone without regard to the party.[58] Hale's candidacy seemed one that would appeal to antislavery Whigs and Democrats, but most of the "bolting machines" of the old parties apparently ignored it.[59] Seemingly, Hale would be by-passed for the Utica nominee, Van Buren.

The possible subordination of the 1847 Liberty platform and candidates to a party based on the Proviso, and led by Martin Van Buren, caused in furor in Liberty circles. The editor of the Cincinnati Herald promised support for the former President should he receive the nomination of a Free Soil Convention. The Herald editor

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[57]William H. Smith, A Political History of Slavery (New York: Frederick Ungar Company, 1966), p. 97.

[58]T.C. Smith, op. cit., p. 132.

[59]Ibid.

stated that the main issue to be considered in 1848 was the extension of slavery, and added that his readers agreed. Yet, he stated that Hale should not be abandoned.[60]

The majority of Liberty men worked to secure the Free Soil nomination for Hale.[61] But they disagreed on what methods would achieve their goal. Chase wrote Hale, noting his never ending regret that the Liberty meeting had made a nomination, and that Hale had accepted it.

> Your nomination by the Liberty Party,...has identified you with us & compelled you to share the undeserved opprobrium, which has attached to many of the noblest names of the land.... It is very true that your senatorial career has attracted the general admiration of all true hearted...men, and, I verily believe, that if the N.Y. democracy would now place you in nomination all objections would disappear and this state Ohio could be carried for you.[62]

Chase believed that should the Barnburner Democrats, assembled at Utica, call for a National Free Territory Convention under the Democratic Banner," it would be expedient for Hale to withdraw from the race. The Cincinnatian advised

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[60] The Cincinnati Weekly Herald, July 12, 1848.

[61] Sewell, op. cit., p. 98.

[62] S.P. Chase to J.P. Hale, June 15, 1848, in S.H. Dodson (compiler), "Chase Correspondence," op. cit., II, p. 135.

that the Liberty nominee write a letter to Samuel Lewis, President of the State Liberty Convention of Ohio, stating his "original position as a Democrat," withdraw his name from nomination, express his desire for "the union of Freemen for the sake of Freedom," and urge that those who nominated him attend the Free Soil Convention, and "govern their actions" by its decisions.[63] Bailey also thought that Hale should withdraw his candidacy so that his name might be placed before the Free Soil meeting as an unaffiliated candidate.[64] The Ohio leaders, and other Hale promoters observed that Conscience Whigs and Barnburners would rather create a candidate than adopt one.[65]

Not all Liberty men favored Hale's withdrawal. Lewis Tappan, who opposed various Ohio leaders' efforts at union with Proviso men, also disagreed with Chase's advice to the Liberty candidate.[66] Tappan thought Hale should "'stand firm,'" and warned that if the nominee withdrew his candidacy, the Liberty organization would

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[63] Ibid., p. 136.

[64] Sewell, loc. cit.

[65] Ibid.

[66] American Freeman, July 5, 1848, citing Emancipator.

seem weak, and Van Buren's candidacy would be strengthened. Other objected to Hale's resignation because they refused to coalesce with the Barnburners, fearing that the one strength of the Liberty party, its moral position, would be compromised.[67]

The Executive Committee of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society issued an "Address To The Friends Of Liberty" in which they affirmed their faith in Hale, and exhorted Liberty party members to "stand by their principles and the man of their choice...." The Committee, which included Arthur and Lewis Tappan, and William Jay, advised Liberty men to "preserve their unity, enlarge their operations," and "refuse to be diverted from the course" they had marked out for themselves. The panel pleaded with party adherents to refuse alliance with the disaffected of the other parties who would go no further than to oppose the extension of slavery.

> Non-extension is not abolition, though included in it; and it will be time to consider overtures of coalition from fellow-citizens who have recently awakened to see the disastrous policy of slavery extension when they shall have embraced the great anti-slavery principles we avow....[68]

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[67]Sewell, loc. cit.

[68]Address To The Friends Of Liberty, By The Executive Committee Of The American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (New York: William Harned, July 4, 1848), p. 4.

The Society directorate considered denationalization of slavery, abolition in the District of Columbia, and the overthrow of slavery in the country by "peaceful and constitutional means" as the "great" antislavery principles.[69]

A Western Pennsylvania Convention adopted a resolution which showed basic agreement with the opinions expressed by the American and Foreign Society's Committee.

> Resolved. That the only hope of the slave's redemption, so far as political action can accomplish it, is in the Liberty party, which, while it aims at preventing the EXTENSION of Slavery, aims also at its entire ABOLITION, by the use of all the political instrumentalities within its reach.[70]

The Maine Liberty Standard, edited by Austin Willey, noted that slavery either did or did not have a right to "National favor." If slavery's advocates could properly assume that the law bound the federal government to aid them, the Ohio Free Territory's Convention had advanced a mistaken opinion. However, if the Constitution did not provide for the national government's maintenance

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[69] Ibid.

[70] American Freeman, July 5, 1848.

of the peculiar institution, antislavery men needed to take a much stronger position than the one advanced at Columbus.[71]

Many Liberty men adamantly opposed Van Buren's possible candidacy as they had his election in 1840. While President, he had opposed abolition in the District of Columbia, and taken a pro-Southern stand concerning the gag rule and the abolitionist mail controversy. In a letter to the Utica Barnburner Convention, Van Buren again proclaimed opposition to abolition in the nation's capital.

> Whilst the candidate of my friends for the Presidency, I distinctly announced my opinion in favor of the power of Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, although I was, for reasons which were then, and are still satisfactory to my mind, very decidedly opposed to its exercise there.[72]

Thus, when the Free Soil Convention met at Buffalo, Liberty men were faced with a double-edged problem. Two probable candidates vied for the nomination: Hale, the Liberty nominee since 1847, and Van Buren, candidate

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[71] Ibid., citing Maine Liberty Standard.

[72] Proceedings of the Utica Convention For The Nomination of PRESIDENT and VICE-PRESIDENT of the United States, held at Utica, N.Y., June 22nd, 1848 [n.p.], July, 1848, p. 13.

of the Barnburner Democrats since June, 1848. Also, the efficacy and morality of accepting the program of the Proviso men necessitated considerable soul-searching on the part of Liberty men attending the August meeting.

In the meantime, a group of men who favored the general reform program of the Liberty League had conferred at Auburn, New York, January 12, 1848. The Auburn assembly claimed that the nominating delegates at the 1847 Buffalo Convention, rather than the Liberty party, had rejected Gerrit Smith's resolutions. The group suggested that another Liberty convention convene at Buffalo in June.[73] Smith endorsed the Auburn plan in the hope that true Liberty party nominations and principles would be the concern of the proposed meeting.[74] Before the rump convention met, the Liberty League, led by William Goodell, met at Rochester, New York, and reaffirmed the Peterboro leader's nomination.[75]

The secessionist assembly met at Buffalo, June 14, calling themselves the National Liberty Convention. The delegates nominated Smith for President; and since they

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[73] American Freeman, February 16, 1848.

[74] Harlow, op. cit., p. 182.

[75] American Freeman, July 15, 1848.

could not accept his Democratic proclivities, professed their disdain for John Hale. They charged that the 1847 Buffalo Convention had been a spurious meeting, and accused the Ohio leadership, (specifically, Bailey, Lewis, Chase, and Stanley Matthews,) of plotting a coalition, and the subsequent dismemberment of the Liberty organization. The platform adopted by the group paralleled that of the League.[76] The Industrial Congress, an organization representing various National Reform Associations, met at Philadelphia and also named Smith as their presidential candidate.[77] Thus, the Peterboro reformer entered the 1848 presidential race under the auspices of three groups: the Liberty League, the National Liberty Party, and the Industrial Congress.

Prior to the Free Soil meeting, John Hale suggested to Lewis Tappan that he conditionally resign his candidacy during, rather than before the convention. The New Hampshire Senator, after a realistic appraisal of the political scene, concluded that a majority of the antislavery men, including Liberty party members, would

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[76]Proceedings of the National Liberty Convention, held at Buffalo, N.Y., June 14th & 15th, 1848; including the resolutions and addresses adopted by that body, and speeches of Beriah Green and Gerrit Smith on that occasion. [n.p.], 1848. pp. 1-8.

[77]American Freeman, loc. cit.

unite at Buffalo, and most likely choose Van Buren as their candidate. Hale decided to place his letter of declination in the care of Samuel Lewis, who would present it at his discretion. Should the convention adopt a platform satisfactory to Liberty men, Hale advised presentation of the letter. If the Liberty delegates at Buffalo could not accept the convention's platform, however, the letter would not be used, and the Liberty party would act independently of the freesoilers. Tappan's doubts concerning the Barnburner's principles, and distrust of Van Buren, led him to advise Hale to put off a final decision until other Liberty leaders could be consulted. Lewis agreed with Tappan, and refused to take charge of Hale's resignation letter.[78]

Delegates attending the National Free Soil Convention represented eighteen states, including Virginia, Delaware, and Maryland, three slave states. They numbered in their ranks Liberty men, Free Soil Democrats, anti-Southern (Conscience) Whigs, and New York Barnburners. Charles Francis Adams, son of former President J. Q. Adams, presided over the mass convention, (a separate convention of delegates formed the policy of the meeting).

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[78]Sewell, op. cit., pp. 98-99.

At the outset of the August proceedings, Salmon Chase, who hoped for the reform of the Democratic party, aimed at satisfying the Barnburners. The Cincinnatian saw indications of a division concerning the platform, andthus, called on Preston King, a prominent New York Democrat, to deliver a speech, and present its basic propositions as a party platform. Chase's request was prompted by a desire to allay all jealousies on the part of the New York Democrats.[79] The resolutions finally adopted by the meeting were, however, for the most part, drafted by Chase. In return for platform concessions, Liberty men such as Joshua Leavitt and Henry Stanton submitted to an informal delegate vote that favored Van Buren's candidacy.[80] The party plank adopted in deference to Liberty support asserted that the federal government was duty bound to abolish slavery where it possessed the power to do so. Other platform planks declared that Congress had no power over slavery in the states, but asserted that it was the government's duty to prohibit the extension of slavery, and denied that Congress could

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[79]Warden, op. cit., p. 318.

[80]Oliver Dyer, Phonographic Report Of The Proceedings Of The National Free Soil Convention At Buffalo, N.Y., August 9th and 10th, 1848 (Buffalo, New York: G.H. Derby & Company, 1848), p. 28.

institute slavery. The Free Soil program also demanded freedom for Oregon, and a homestead law, (also a plank of the Liberty League platform, and later part of the Republican party's program,) and favored cheap postage, abolition of unnecessary offices, internal improvements, early payment of the public debt, and a tariff for revenue.[81]

After the adoption of the platform, and the informal vote for Van Buren, Leavitt moved that the New Yorker's nomination be made unanimous. Samuel Lewis seconded Leavitt's speech, in which the Easterner claimed that the Liberty party was not dead, but "TRANSLATED."[82] The vice-presidential nomination went by acclamation to C.F. Adams. As the meeting adjourned, the Free Soilers readied themselves for the coming battle with the cry, Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labor, Free Men.

In the November election, Van Buren polled over 290,000 votes, 10 per cent of the popular vote. The Free Soil candidate, however, failed to win any electoral votes, and Zachary Taylor became the twelfth President of the United States. Most Liberty organizations disappeared after the establishment of the Free Soil organization,

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[81] Ibid., pp. 19-20.

[82] Ibid., p. 28.

(some called the new party the Free Democracy). Yet many Liberty men could not bring themselves to vote for Van Buren.

James Birney, who refused to support Hale or Van Buren, voted for Gerrit Smith in 1848. The twice-defeated Liberty presidential candidate believed many Free Soil supporters had merely jumped on the new party bandwagon for expendiency's sake. He feared that old leaders, and old principles would be ignored.[83] John G. Whittier thought Van Buren "too old a sinner to hope for his conversion."[84] Lewis Tappan, who absented himself from the Free Soil meeting, reluctantly voted for Smith.[85]

Tappan regretted that he had not used his influence to prevent other Liberty men from committing themselves to Van Buren. He thought abandonment of Hale for the former President had proved a "great blunder." The New York philanthropist confessed that he had never had confidence in Chase as an abolitionist, and lamented that many Liberty men could not bear to be in a minority. In Tappan's

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[83]Fladeland, op. cit., p. 265.

[84]Pickard, op. cit., p. 333.

[85]Lewis Tappan to F.J. LeMoyne, November 18, 1848, in "Documents: Anti-Slavery Letters of Dr. F.J. Le Moyne, of Washington, Pennsylvania," Journal of Negro History, XVIII, (1933), p. 453.

opinion, his old friend Henry Stanton, had been "ruined by ambition, desire of office & applause." [86]

Warnings of the Garrisonians and others came back to haunt purist Liberty advocates. Early opponents of a separate abolitionist party had cautioned that the sordidness of politics would diminish the moral righteousness of the antislavery program. Lewis Tappan himself had opposed the formation of the party on religious and moral grounds. Now disillusioned, the reformer stated that the Liberty party should have led, rather than followed, the Free Soil movement. To Tappan's mind, in 1848, Liberty men had taken part in a political and philosophical absurdity.[87]

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[86]Lewis Tappan to F.J. LeMoyne, December 26, 1849, in "Anti-Slavery Letters of Dr. F.J. Le Moyne," op. cit., p. 456.

[87]Ibid.

ASSESSMENT OF THE LIBERTY PARTY

Liberty party contemporaries probably thought of the organization as a complete failure. When the abolitionist political body merged with the Free Soil party in 1848, no Liberty candidate had been elected to a major state or federal governmental post. They labored in vain to divorce the national government from slavery for the peculiar institution existed in the District of Columbia, and in the territories, and the interstate slave trade continued. The South would not abolish slavery until force of arms compelled such a course. Yet the Liberty party brought the slavery issue into politics. If it did not formulate a definite solution, it directed the nation toward one. The anti-slavery sentiment that swept the North in 1846 might have been less vehement had the Liberty men not harrangued the nation the preceding six years.

Liberty men, such as Lewis Tappan, lamented the path followed by the party when it joined the Free Soil movement, which opposed the extension of slavery without calling for its extinction. Tappan charged that the Liberty-Free Soil coalition was a political and philo-

sophical absurdity. However, the New York philanthropist erred in his judgment. When he included the word political in his estimation, Tappan's reasoning faltered, for the coalition was far from a political absurdity. In political affairs, compromise is not always desired, but it is usually necessary. Had the abolitionist party men refused to join the Free Soil movement, they would have taken part in a political absurdity. Compromise, in 1848, was political necessity for Liberty men, Often regression is the way to progression.

Tappan's view of the coalition, while unrealistic, was typical of many purist Liberty followers. Perhaps the greatest fault of the party members was their lack of realism. Yet, their most admirable trait was their idealism. While naive, they were sincere. Their political philosophy was based on the Higher Law Doctrine; they believed that all human power derivated from the Creator. In short, the Liberty men wanted God in politics, and Christianity in government. They termed slavery a sin against God and a crime against man. The religious and idealistic character of the abolitionist

political organization, while destined to deprive the party of success, made it unique and accounts for its political significance.

Characteristic of third parties is their policy of agitation for change, where it be progressive or regressive. Throughout the history of the American Republic, third parties have been noted for their emphasis on agitation and education. Often they offer no solution to the problems they point out. Usually, as in the case of the Liberty party, they present a vague or sketchy outline of a program, forsaking concrete and definitive measures.

A program of agitation brings with it men who can be described as enthusiasts, sometimes, fanatics. Practical men will not endure participation in futile projects. Salmon Chase exemplifies the pragmatist, who, though probably sincere, cannot participate at length in a lost cause. These men forsake pure principle in favor of partial advantage. While the Liberty men were agitators and enthusiasts, they were honest, perseverant men.

Owing to the religious nature of the group, and their disdain for politics in general, and politicians

in particular, their party cannot be termed a political machine. Their organization, understandably, resembled the abolitionist societies. Their conventions had the appearance of religious revivals. They met in tents, listened to speeches that resembled sermons as much as political oratory, and many in their fold were clergymen.

Addresses printed by various Liberty conventions were circulated throughout the North as were antislavery society materials. Liberty newspapers, in many cases, had been organs of antislavery societies. When the abolitionist party merged with the freesoilers, they brought with them experienced propagandists who enhanced the Free Soil ranks. Many Liberty publications became Free Soil periodicals. Consequently, a considerable number of propaganda outlets were available to the free-soilers because of the coalition.

Third parties are a training ground for leaders. Abolitionists endured "baptism by fire" before, after, and during their political adventure. Abolitionist's public appearances often led to disorderliness on the part of audiences, and thus gave the freesoilers seasoned

veterans who could deal with hostile elements.

Disregarding the fact that it lost its identity, the main failure of the Liberty party was its inability to convince the freesoilers of the necessity of espousing Negro equality. The abolitionist societies stressed moral suasion because they wanted to impress the sinfulness of slavery upon the slaveholder. One reason for abolitionist opposition to the formation of a separate party was their belief that slavery was perpetuated by the white man's inability or refusal to consider the Negro his equal, thus, the slavery issue was not a political, but a social and moral problem. Although the Liberty party called for equality of the races, justice to all men, and an end to discriminatory laws in the North, as well as in the South, their civil right's program was not incorporated in the Free Soil platform.[1] Universal recognition of the equality of all men has never been achieved by any organization be it political, religious, or social. Mankind shares in the defeat of the Liberty call for racial equality.

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[1]Eric Foner, "Politics and Prejudice: The Free Soil Party and the Negro, 1849-1852," Journal of Negro History, L (October, 1965), pp. 237-256.

While the Liberty men failed to get their new allies to consider the Negro as an equal and to underwrite a program to remove the Black Laws, they did get the Free Soilers and Republicans to adopt their economic ideas. Though their moral program failed their economic interpretation was adopted in total. Just as the Liberty party blamed the Panic of 1837 on the slaveholders, the Republicans attributed the economic disaster of 1857 to the South. Liberty men, primarily led by William Goodell and Joshua Leavitt, insisted that the slave South placed a burden on the national economy. In New England, it was maintained that the Southern cotton planter, not Northern manufacturers, benefited from American commercial negotiations, while in the Northwest, farmers were told that an over-emphasis on cotton and tobacco grown by slave labor kept wheat out of the world commercial market. Leavitt argued that the federal government sought advantages for cotton trade when it should have been trying to influence the repeal of the English Corn Laws. The Liberty men made much of the free labor concept, especially in the Northwest. They pointed out that the South monopolized public offices. Thus, the principles of racial equality failed, while a program of sectional prejudice succeeded. The Free Soil and Republican parties played up the concept of a "Slave Power" as the Liberty party had.

Although the party faded from the political scene in 1848, and some Liberty men would not vote for Martin Van Buren, later many saw fit to join the Free Soil movement, and eventually, men such as James G. Birney cast their votes for the party of Abraham Lincoln.[2] Although its contemporaries and others considered the Liberty party a failure, in retrospect, and in view of the criteria of a third party, it succeeded. While the Republican party and its progenitor, the Free Soil party, are credited with ending American slavery, these groups might not have succeeded without Liberty leadership in matters of agitation, education, and propaganda. In the antislavery vanguard, Liberty men took the van.

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[2]Betty L. Fladeland, James Gillespie Birney: Slaveholder To Abolitionist (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1955), p. 265.

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THEY TOOK THE VAN: TEN YEARS OF POLITICAL ABOLITIONISM, THE LIBERTY PARTY, 1839-1848

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Thesis Abstract

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Abolitionists formed the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833, and began program of moral suasion aimed at convincing the nation that slavery was a sinful institution. Their methods of attack, (mailing propaganda, delivering lectures, etc.,) however, met with little success, and often encountered violent reaction. By 1838, many antislavery men concluded that political action was the only effectual deterrent to slavery and slaveholders' influence in national affairs.

Yet presentation of antislavery petitions in Congress, and questioning candidates for public office on their views concerning the peculiar institution were ineffective measures. Thus, independent antislavery nominations and, eventually, a separate abolitionist party developed.

The third party program was strongly opposed by some of the American Anti-Slavery Society's leaders, particularly, William Lloyd Garrison, editor of The Liberator, the most prominent abolitionist newspaper. Philosophical differences among its members caused the disruption of the American Anti-Slavery Society and the formation of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. The movement for an abolitionist party coincided with the Society split and many anti-Garrisonians, namely, Joshua Leavitt, William Goodell, Alvan Stewart, and James G. Birney, all leaders in the national organization, were instrumental in establishing the abolitionist party.

The third party idea gradually gained new adherents, and after running James Birney for President in 1840 with little success, its members renominated the former Kentucky slaveholder in 1844, thereby aiding in the defeat of Henry Clay. The abolitionist or Liberty party, as it came to be known, was formed by men who abhorred slavery. From 1840 to 1844, the only requirement for party membership was that of an aversion to the peculiar institution. Liberty platforms specifically aimed at convincing the public that abolition was necessary and constitutional

in the District of Columbia, and the territories, and that the interstate slave trade had to be abolished.

Yet it became obvious that no Liberty candidate would be chosen by an electorate concerned with other issues of national interest. Some in the party, including Birney, wished to transform the organization into a general reform party. Others, chiefly Salmon P. Chase and Gamaliel Bailey, both Cincinnatians, believed a coalition with antislavery Whigs and Democrats was the wisest course to follow. Purist Liberty men, who professed belief in the Higher Law Doctrine and considered slavery unconstitutional wherever it existed, could not accept the coalitionists' philosophy. Consequently, in 1848, the practical Liberty men merged with the new Free Soil party, an organization also composed of Conscience Whigs and Barnburner Democrats. In later years, the Free Soil party and its successor, the Republican party, were backed by former Liberty men.

The Liberty party died in 1848, but some of its program continued for its successor waged a war against the Southern slaveocracy, and convinced many Northerners of the existence of a slaveholding conspiracy. The Liberty party exemplifies the third party in America. It agitated,

educated, trained leaders, and failed. Yet its failure was not complete for the movement, born in the Northeast and nurtured in the Northwest, engulfed the nation, and directly led to the Emancipation Proclamation.

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